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# Staying *au courant*



When I was a university student, way back when, I would go to the section in the library that held the collection related to my discipline and run my eyes across the hundreds of volumes, some thin, some thick, that lined the shelves. It seemed to me that if I hunkered down and spent a few weeks that could possibly stretch into months, I would be able to at least scan every one of them. It seemed like a body of work that I could get my head around. If I wanted to venture slightly outside my field, I could rifle through the library's card catalogue and feel like I had a grasp of the volume of material that existed out there.

But of course, that was before the internet changed everything. Now, the most precisely worded search will yield hundreds of thousands of results, and we still have a sense that there is much, much more out there. More than any one person could even scan in a lifetime. Add to this the certainty that there's more new knowledge being generated by the second.

We live in paradoxical times. On the one hand, the access to information has never been easier. On the other, most of us feel that we can never catch up with it all.

Yet, as educators, there is no getting away from the need to stay current – with material, methodologies, and mindsets. That's exactly why we decided to draw on our vibrant network of contributors to offer some insights on how they manage to stay on top of things. What strategies do they use to keep up with the times and to bring a freshness to their teaching, year in, year out?

*Read on, to find out... and by the way, Happy Teacher's Day!*

*Usha Raman*

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# Let us teachers continue to learn

Anjali Noronha

The author is an MA in Economics from Delhi School of Economics and has nearly 40 years of experience in elementary education in curriculum, program, teacher development and research. She has been on a number of review committees of government education programs. She has been instrumental in designing and giving direction to a number of curricular programs in Eklavya, Madhya Pradesh. She has experience of the school level, as well as university and policy contributions at MHRD, NCERT, NCTE, TISS, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chattisgarh, Assam, Ladakh. She can be reached at [noronha.anjali@gmail.com](mailto:noronha.anjali@gmail.com).

Teachers are the cornerstones of society, especially schoolteachers. They shape many generations of children. They are expected to give their best for the future generation. We complain about teachers not reading, not keeping up with what is required of them. But do we, as a society, as parents, give them the space, the encouragement, and the nurturing that is necessary to be loving and competent teachers? This Teacher's Day let us try and understand how the teacher keeps herself responsive to the superhuman demands on her, reflect on the environment that she gets and learn how much it supports her.

In this article I will share some insights based on conversations with teachers from different systems and how they work on their own development. Then I will look at how policies on professional development have shaped expectations from and inputs to develop teachers. I will also share my own experiences of making spaces for professional development as a person working on curriculum and teacher development and what lessons these hold for creating a learning environment for teachers.

I will conclude the article with some suggestions on how schools and education systems can provide these spaces and how teachers can be given the strength and support to demand, curate, and manage their development so that children get a better future.

## Teachers' professional development

Today, there are a variety of schools in the system: state government schools, central government schools – Kendriya Vidyalayas and Navodaya Vidyalayas, and a wide variety of private schools charging anywhere from ₹500 to ₹50,000 fees per month. The facilities available to teachers in each of these schools vary a lot too.

The Kendriya Vidyalaya teachers have a monthly meeting for planning and review. In these meetings though only marks, corrections, and the chapter plan for the next month are submitted. The students have an off day on this day. They have no system of peer review or discussion on readings in a regular way. If they have to present something at a conference, they prepare for it using whatever resources are available at hand. The teachers do a refresher course once in three years. Even though the Kendriya Vidyalayas have well-equipped libraries for children and a library period every week for each class, there is no system for teachers to consult the library on a regular basis. It is left to individual teachers, but the system



doesn't expect this as a role from the teacher. The result is that the teachers are generally unaware as to whether the library has a teachers' section or whether they get any teachers' journals.

Teachers of the state government schools in Madhya Pradesh have a fairly regular system of workshops and meetings for professional development, as probably other states also do. There are usually a couple of training workshops every year on different topics. Elementary school teachers are also supposed to attend cluster (a group of schools) level meetings every month. There are Cluster and Block level resource centres for teachers too. The meetings, workshops, and resource centres give access to different resources, which the teacher is supposed to go through. Often, these are write-ups on activities to be done in class. They are also part of WhatsApp groups in which different teachers and NGOs involved in trainings and workshops circulate resources. Some teachers may go through these. Many a time, these resources are not woven into any sequence, so it is difficult to assess their cumulative outcome. Some of the schoolteachers are also resource teachers and therefore access the resources available to them primarily to prepare for their workshop sessions, but otherwise don't browse through them on a regular basis.

As for private schools, schools which are constantly advertised and aspired to, the managements of only a very few create a regular space and time for teachers to upgrade their competence. There are a handful of schools that keep teaching time to only 60-70% of the school time. The rest of the time is structured so that teachers can read, discuss, and enhance their abilities. They have weekly meetings in which they present on a topic based on their reading and connect it to their experiences. A few other schools organize workshops for their teachers once in a while or ask them to attend online sessions or courses. These schools are rare though. There are always a few interested teachers in private schools. They are inspired by their students to search for solutions to issues that come up in the classroom. They look up resources on the web and discuss with friends and family. These teachers are overworked and hassled. The other teachers distance themselves by both positive and negative comments. The groups who support professional development say that the school managements are not willing to give any time for continuous professional development of the teachers from school time.



Let us now have a look at how the school teacher and their development has evolved in post independence India.

### **Teachers and teacher education since Indian independence**

In the first few decades after independence, it was assumed that once you have a requisite qualification and get recruited as a teacher, you only have to teach the classes and subjects that you're given till your retirement. In the early decades, there were not even enough qualified teachers; teacher education institutions were in short supply, so teachers would be recruited without qualifications and get rostered for their Basic Training Course – BTC (a precursor to the D.Ed). Continuous Professional development was nowhere on the horizon; becoming a teacher was considered a vocation, not a career, and perhaps for this reason there were very good teachers then.

In the mid 80s, the New Education Policy 1986 took cognizance of the need for improvement in the school teacher cadre. District Institutes of Education and Training (DIET) were set up and given charge of in-service professional development along with pre-service teacher education. This was the first time that a systemic initiative for teacher professional development was taken. Whenever textbooks would change in the state, teachers would be given refresher training on how to teach the new books. Some non government organizations like Eklavya worked with the government in a few schools and set up systems of continuous professional development like weekly reviews and monthly meetings in a cluster of schools. This was driven by the system and not left to the individual teacher.

The National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) was set up in 1993 as a body to regulate teacher education only after the NEP 1986.

In the mid 1990s, there was a thrust given to curricular and structural reform in primary education across the country through the District Primary Education Program (DPEP). In this program, apart from the DIETs, a system of Cluster and Block resource centres were opened for primary schools, which were supposed to have regular meetings and refresher workshops. The DIETs also got further activated as hubs for in-service workshops and resource centres.

A system of Block and Cluster resource teachers visiting schools to give teachers peer support was also set up. This continues to date.

The National Curriculum Framework 2005 and the Right to Education (RTE) Act 2009 put the teacher on centre stage. Reading materials for teachers are being developed since then. Focus group papers and the National Curriculum Framework 2005 have been great resources in enhancing teachers' understanding of educational issues, as have been a list of books on education provided at district and sub-district levels through the DPEP, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA – program to extend quality reform to middle schools) and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA – for secondary schools). For the first time in 2009, a National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE) was developed with separate chapters on continuous professional development of teachers, preparing teacher educators, and implementation strategies.

However, ways and means to enhance teacher capacities have been limited to the government system. The privatization of school education has been growing by leaps and bounds. There were hardly any private schools in the 1970s and 80s – around 10%. Today, private schools account for 25-30% of the number of schools and about 50% of the enrollment! This is significant as the professional development expected and implemented by private schools is almost absent.

Another sector that has been intensively participating in teacher professional development over more than four decades is the non government and private professional groups. I have been participating in the professional development programs through this sector for more than 40 years now. I reflect on some of my experiences through this sector and end with a few suggestions drawing from the rest of the article.

### **Self development – purpose drives professional development**

In the early 80s, when we established Eklavya in collaboration with the government, our mandate was to take forward the science teaching program developed by Kishore Bharati and develop curricular programs for other subjects for government primary and middle schools. A curriculum program for us meant curriculum objectives, learning materials, teacher training every year and monthly meetings with teachers. This was the structural model that had been developed by the science program and adapted for other curricular programs.

I was involved in the development and implementation of the primary education program and the social science program for

middle schools. I worked on the citizenship section, which was then called civics. Later, I was involved in collaborating with state governments to universalize quality in policy and teacher development programs. The culture that we established in the early days was that one must read what has happened in India and other countries in these spheres, debate, and discuss and only then propose what we could do and make drafts that would be critiqued by peers and experts. We needed to also look at research in these areas – both in curriculum development and in teacher education. We began these programs when Eklavya had just been set up. We didn't have a library of our own, nor was there internet in those times. We accessed books from the section on education in the British Library in Bhopal and accessed the NCERT, Delhi University, and JNU

libraries for our research through our university based resource persons.

But most importantly, we made space for this reading and writing and reflection as part of our work in Eklavya. The time needed to consult books and university resource people was built into the program. This helped us a lot and brought both academic rigour and a rigour of practice. Individual work had to be critically peer reviewed.

This was an integral part of our own self-development and we tried to build this into that of the teachers' as well. This habit of regular critical reading with a purpose has become a lifelong one in most of us who have worked with Eklavya. The government education departments which supported us at the time allowed us this time.

In 2002, when the government curricular programs closed down, our work took a new turn. On the one hand, we worked on supplemental education at the village and *basti* level, on another we worked as a resource group for certain government education bodies and civil society groups. We also developed teacher education courses – both pre-service and in-service. From 2008 to 2019, I was involved with different teams at all the three levels and also in building policy like the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) and the National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE). I was a member of NCTE too. I worked on developing the EVS books for Ladakh, a whole school development program with a group of schools, couple of papers and teaching part of one in the MA Elementary Education blended mode course at TISS, and strengthening four DIETs. I also





initiated a program of short-term blended mode courses, for which I developed one on reading and libraries and mentored participants of the Tata Trust LEC course. All of this gave me the experience to reflect on the requirements for building, teaching, and mentoring in professional development programs.

I found that while the latter two forced us to continue reading with a purpose – for inputs into building courses and curriculum – supplemental learning, somehow was the most difficult, particularly for those of us who actually worked on the ground. The nature of work itself was somehow not conducive to reading and reflection, priority being the teaching and activities in the class. This is when I realized that it is easy to say teachers don't read. Under the circumstances of their work – handling classes of 25 plus students for 4-5 hours a day and the many administrative jobs, it is difficult to concentrate on reading, especially those materials that required higher order comprehension. If we did not allow ourselves regular space and time to read and reflect on the week's activities, it wouldn't happen. This is when we began to build a regular weekly reading and reflection. For this, we had to design our working days and week in such a manner that we had at least a couple of hours to read at least a couple of days a week and a day off from field work in order to prepare presentations, discuss and make decisions.

Today, with the online option of workshops and meetings, resources across the country and the globe can be accessed by teachers. There are a number of good short but systematic courses available. At the same time there are also a lot of single or series

of videos and articles of bad or mediocre material. Unless there is peer group discussion along with more experienced mentors to guide, this reading and watching may not improve quality much.

The National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education (NCFTE) 2009 outlines the purposes of teacher professional development thus:

- Explore, reflect on, and develop one's own practice.
- Deepen one's knowledge of and update oneself about one's academic discipline or other areas of school curriculum.
- Research and reflect on learners and their education.
- Understand and update oneself on educational and social issues.
- Prepare for other roles professionally linked to education/teaching, such as teacher education, curriculum development, or counselling.
- Break out of intellectual isolation and share experiences and insights with others in the field, both teachers and academics working in the area of specific disciplines as well as intellectuals in the immediate and wider society.

If the above purposes are to be fulfilled, the teacher must have access to both material and human resources. As can be seen from the above description of different kinds of schools, opportunities are almost absent in the private sector, with a few exceptions and need to be streamlined in the public sector.

### In conclusion

We can draw the following suggestions from the above descriptions and reflections:

- Good quality education requires that the teacher gets a priority space for her reading,

reflection, peer discussion in order develop her competence and work.

- Each school, whether government or private, needs to be equipped with a good physical and e-library on education for the teachers, which incorporates, curricular research, education theory, and practice in subjects. This should have access to research and pedagogy journals.
- Unless teaching load per teacher is reduced, so that she has at least an hour every day to read at the library and one day a week for presentation, discussion, and understanding, teachers will not be able to make good use of the resources available. They also need support in reading and comprehension at an advanced level from more experienced mentors. Space needs to be made for these.
- There are now short online courses available and teachers must be encouraged with incentives to take these courses after they are whetted by the school management.
- Peer forums through WhatsApp groups can enhance sharing of resources and discussions across a wide variety of teachers.
- And lastly, where budgets are available as in the government systems – committees of teachers to select good books and resources could be set up and functionalized. In private schools, dynamic teachers could and should find ways to get the management to set up such systems in their schools. They could look at some exemplar school libraries and courses and take them up in their schools.

***Happy Teacher's Day to all and happy learning and teaching.***

# A book club for teachers

**Aruna Sankaranarayanan**

The writer is the author of *Zero Limits: Things Every 20-Something Should Know*. She blogs at [www.arunasankaranarayanan.com](http://www.arunasankaranarayanan.com).

This issue of *Teacher Plus* emphasizes the importance of being part of professional associations so that you may update and upskill yourself with the latest research, pedagogic theories, and practices. While formal associations can be invaluable, you as a teacher, could also informally create a network of professionals to stay connected and relevant. And one of the best ways to do that is to form a book club with fellow teachers, both within and outside your school.

Rather than writing about a particular book, I will discuss the benefits of forming a book club and how you may create and sustain one. Given that we all have various professional and personal commitments vying for our attention, reading often takes a back seat in our adult lives. Though we may have been avid readers as children and in our youth, the various responsibilities that accompany adulting often leave us pressed for time. And, at the end of a long day, we can just about muster the energy to reach for the TV remote.

Yet, many adults wish they read more. And, one way to make this happen is to create a book club with your colleagues. A book club can function with as few as three members; while more members do make it merrier and provide a diverse array of perspectives, it might be advisable to cap the club at 10 members.

Another advantage of a book club is that they can be highly flexible with members determining the rules and routines of the club. So, once you identify a small group of teachers who wish to stretch their reading muscles, all you need to do is to meet and decide upon a book you wish to read. If this proves challenging, especially if people have divergent tastes, each member can take turns recommending a book. Or, you can employ a democratic process by voting for a book among a list of options. Ideally, the members of the club should have their own copies, but some may choose to share.

Don't be dismayed if the book chosen by the group doesn't meld with your reading preferences. One of the benefits of being in a book club is that it extends our reading envelopes as we get to read books we otherwise may not pick up. And, you may be pleasantly surprised by a book that lies outside your comfort zone. If you really don't like the book, that's okay too.

Given that everyone has tight schedules, make sure that you set a realistic deadline for people to finish



a book. Typically, a month should be adequate for people to read a book. When you meet next, people may share their views of the book. If you find that people are initially diffident to speak, you may start with the easiest ice-breaker question, “Did you like the book?” Then you may coax them to elaborate on what resonated with them, or what aspects they found disquieting.

Though reading is essentially a solitary activity and every reader has a unique relationship with a book, discussions at book clubs may broaden your worldview and deepen your understanding of a book. When you hear alternative viewpoints, you may not always agree with them; however, such exchanges may help you examine the book through various prisms. Further, if you are discussing a nonfiction book, your conversations may help clarify and even bolster your understanding of a subject.

Though your book club need not have a broader mission apart from reading and discussing books,

you may consider specific themes based on members’ interests. Be it books on effective pedagogic practices, classroom management, inquiry-based learning, children’s socio-emotional development or self-help to nourish a teacher’s soul, your book club may morph into a bespoke professional development association.

As you get back into the groove of reading, you will find that reading for the book club may make you a more thoughtful and engaged reader. Because you will be reading a book with the idea of discussing it, you are likely to delve more deeply into it. Don’t hesitate to make markings or short notes in pencil in the margins as these might provide fodder for the next meeting.

Over time you will also come to appreciate other members differently. Earlier, with only staff room interactions, conversations may have been limited to quotidian matters. But as you get to hear of your colleagues’ opinions, interests, and experiences during animated book club discussions,

you realize that the otherwise reticent maths teacher is an avid sci-fi enthusiast and the economics teacher has lived in five continents. As people grow more comfortable exchanging their views and asserting their opinions, you are likely to form deeper bonds with them.

But be aware that sometimes discussions may get heated and contentious. Thus, it is advisable to request all members to maintain an open mind and a respectful attitude toward dissenting opinions. If members agree to disagree mindfully and not get roiled up, however, divergent people’s views may be, you may end up having stimulating and broadening exchanges.

If you are inspired to start a book club in your school, don’t dither. Go ahead and recruit members and let the magic unfold. You may even decide to write about your experiences for a future edition of *Teacher Plus*.

# Excitement leads to engagement

**Pradita Nambiar**

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When I look back at my childhood and fondly recollect the teachers I loved in school, I realize they were women who were excited about their work and wanted to make the learning experience of every child in the class joyful. When I decided to become a teacher, I set out to look for the meaning of excitement in the context of a teacher's work. bell hooks in her book *Teaching to Transgress* says that the idea that shaped her pedagogy was that the classroom should be an exciting place, never a boring one. She believed that excitement could co-exist with and even stimulate serious academic engagement (hooks, 1994, page 7). It was this excitement that I was chasing as a teacher. To make this happen, it was essential to consider every classroom as unique and recognize the presence of every child as an active participant of the classroom. And therefore I had to imagine new ways of teaching and enhancing the learning experience of all the children in my class.

Just as children are faced with an explosion of knowledge, I too face challenges to keep abreast of the changes in curriculum, instructional methods, materials, and research in growth and development of children. There are many ways to stay updated: taking up college courses, participating in workshops, being active in professional organizations, and travelling. Cogan and Anderson argue that one of the often overlooked areas to continued professional growth is a regular and conscientious program of professional reading (Cogan, March, 1977, page 254-271).

As a beginner teacher, the first task that the school gave me when I joined was to read a list of 20 books on education which included Paul Freire, Ivan Illyich, Krishna Kumar, J Krishnamurti, M K Gandhi, K T Margaret and so on. The first email from school said that "The list of books below is SHORT! This is the minimum that teachers in our school ought to have read." I was already a lover of books, but this communication made me aware that the job of the teacher is first to be a reader herself.

The school library subscribes to a number of periodicals and magazines like the *National*



*Geographic, At Right Angles, Teacher Plus, and Down To Earth*, thus providing me access to professional reading material. As a novice in this profession, I was constantly on the lookout for best practices. It was in these books and magazines I sometimes got many pragmatic ideas that could be directly implemented in the classroom.

Reviews of the articles or books read are shared in the teachers' meetings and subject specific meetings. Such reviews and discussions provided scope for a critical engagement with the latest literature in the field of education.

Co-teaching for two years in the kindergarten has provided opportunities to learn to teach better. In their book *Teaching to Learn: A View from the Field*, Tobin and Roth maintain that co-teaching offers a structure for teachers to access the resources that foster enhanced opportunities for them to become reflective and proficient teachers (Tobin & Roth, 2006).

For me it provided immense possibilities for individual and collective development. While in the class with a co-teacher, it created a collective responsibility and there was a shared sense of purpose. Unconsciously, I tended to appropriate new ways of teaching as there was not only sharing of the physical space, but also a temporal understanding with my co-teacher. I have realized that the collective responsibility that comes in co-teaching is very different from splitting the work as is typical of team-teaching approaches.

While being caught up in the rush to cover content during the year, there is a tendency to ignore a

number of questions that keep cropping up: Why do I teach the way I do? How did it come to be like this? What is the impact of my teaching on the children I teach? How can I improve? I started maintaining a journal of my classroom processes and vignettes. Sometimes there is an idea swimming in my head or a problem that I am unable to solve in my teaching practice. Putting it down in words, helps me get hold of the idea so that I may think deeply about it or get more ideas without losing it. Can journal writing by

teachers be considered as an act of professional development? If any activity that supports teachers to reflect, learn, and then enables improvement can be considered as professional development, then this one definitely does. These jottings in the journal help me write about my experiences and insights in magazines like *Teacher Plus* and also contribute to peer-reviewed journals. As a result of this practice I went on to collaborate with a researcher and publish a paper 'Reading Aloud as a Leading Activity with Preschool



Artwork: Shilpy Lather

Students' in the journal *Learning Landscapes*.

Mentoring of teachers is an important role to play in the identity formation and professional development of a teacher. The work of a teacher is not an individual enterprise but a community of practice. The mentor-teachers assist in the complex process of teacher professional learning by providing a safe space to examine my practices and make appropriate changes for improvement. The mentor-teachers actively listen with empathy and open mind. My mentors also signpost resources like specific courses (Coursera, Future learn) or webinars on areas of education and general wellbeing. I have done courses like Art & Inquiry: Museum Teaching Strategies for the Classroom and Supporting Children with Difficulties in Reading and Writing.

Participating in conferences and interacting with academicians working in the area of specific disciplines like the History for Peace Conference has helped me to look at non-traditional methods of teaching. Children were exposed to the songs of Meerabai, Guru Nanak, and Kabir, while discussing the chapters on the Bhakti movement. These conferences help re-conceptualize certain pedagogical approaches.

My class has a neurodiverse population; apart from the predominant neurotype, there are autistic and dyslexic children. A number of children have varying types of learning difficulties. My understanding of their needs was limited and I felt the need to view the child through the lens

of their issues. There was also an urgent need to look at my own misconceptions/beliefs of autism and dyslexia. With a better understanding of these children, I would be able to work on how I can change my practice for the better. I therefore signed up for a course on dyslexia with the Maharashtra Dyslexia Association. These kinds of courses equip me to become informed and responsive to the social, psychological, and emotional needs of the children in my class.

Earlier, we had to leave our classrooms to attend workshops and webinars and therefore only a few could attend them. Now with publishers of textbooks (Orient BlackSwan) organizing pedagogically rich courseware and designing workshops that meet our requirements appropriately, it has helped tide with the various demands in the recent years like managing a remote and hybrid

classroom and responding to the health and mental impacts of COVID on children and teachers.

Am I a teacher who is a subject expert or is there more to me than that? Can I make learning more than gathering information and presenting to the children? My task involves not just implementing but also reflecting and deliberating on the nature of learning and classroom pedagogy. At teachers' meetings in small groups, we work on producing our own curricula that suit the cultural and social contexts of the children in our class. I remember the discussion the teachers had in the English language meeting on the method of teaching grammar rules. Should it be prescriptive or should it be derived by the children from the usage? We learn to raise questions about the principles underlying the different classroom methods and not be preoccupied with only classroom discipline and organizing a day's activities.

If the world is to acknowledge the role that teachers play in transforming the minds of young learners, I need to combine scholarly reflection and practice. My aim then as a teacher is to ensure that every child in my class has an active voice be it loud or a whisper in my ear.

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# Staying alert to opportunity

Deepika Lakhera

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After a self-imposed sabbatical of eight long years, I returned to work as a primary school teacher. I was apprehensive but also excited. One of the challenges that I faced in my first year of teaching was to cater to students who were on different learning curves. Each student had different learning abilities and styles, wherein one teaching strategy would not help the entire class. I understood that I needed to be well-equipped and think critically while making a lesson plan to cater to a heterogenous group of students.

I was eager and open to learning new skills and making use of the opportunities that were coming my way. I was introduced to new pedagogical skills such as thinking routines, story-based teaching, and innovative instructional materials designed by my school. These helped me fill the gap that my eight-year sabbatical had imposed on me and step out of my comfort zone.

One of the first workshops that was suggested to the teachers of my school was on 'public speaking' skills. The teachers agreed and enrolled in a 'speech craft' session, where they learnt to prepare a speech and deliver it before an audience. The session helped me overcome my fear of speaking before large groups. The skills that I learnt from these sessions have helped me conduct in-house workshops for my colleagues and speak with confidence while interacting with parents.

Every summer, before the break, the school advises us teachers to read a book either connected to education or self-improvement. When school reopens for the new academic session, an in-depth book discussion



Self-correction, outcome of one the workshop from summer reading book *Teaching Tales and Learning Trails*

Photos courtesy: Deepika Lakhera

follows. Some of the books that I have read in the past five years are – *Teaching Tales and Learning Trails*, *Imagine: No Child is Invisible*, *Totto-Chan*, *Diva Swapna*, and *Fluid*. Some practices like self-correction and assessment and collaborative and multidimensional approaches to teaching-learning are the by-products of these book discussions.

We were encouraged to read blogs, watch educational content on YouTube, and read articles. The reading/watching were always followed either by discussion or encouraging teachers to write and express.



Some post-reading activities done by the teachers in the past.

Saturdays were mostly used to learn and share. Teachers who had attended workshops outside the school were encouraged to share their learnings with their colleagues. I have conducted sessions on story-based pedagogy for my colleagues. In the process of trying out all these initiatives, I began to enjoy my second innings as a teacher. I became a student, constantly learning from new experiences and also from other teachers. For instance, I learned to plan and be more organized from one of my colleagues.

Investing in education starts with investing in the teachers. Our school has been very progressive and open to empowering teachers. The school does need analysis of areas where teachers need to be empowered and identifies courses that teachers can take up. For instance, as I moved from teaching primary classes to middle school, the principal encouraged me to attend a course conducted by TISS (Tata Institute of Social Sciences) on Designing Learning Experience for the English Classroom. I was very excited as well as nervous to be a part of this course as it was my first online course and I had some concerns about using technology. However, it gave me the confidence to reflect on planning my classroom activities and equipped me with the skills to design an engaging lesson plan.

A teacher needs to continuously learn and unlearn. Over the last five years, I have attended several workshops to embrace the changes I need to upgrade my skills and improve my teaching-learning practices and the opportunity to move to teach from primary to middle school.

Attending continuous professional development programs positioned me better in classroom teaching. I was able to adapt storytelling as a pedagogy and integrate art, bring in creativity in my lesson plans and question papers.

Some of the workshops that I learnt from:

- i) The storytelling workshops conducted by Surekha Dey and Vikram Sridhar gave me insight into story-based pedagogy.



Use of story maps in story-based pedagogy

- ii) The critical thinking through stories workshop by Nivedita Bedadur left a profound imprint on my teaching and learning journey. The series of sessions conducted by her taught me to use stories as a source to sensitize children towards sensitive topics. I was able to conduct 'Literary Week' in school with a different perspective after this session.



Learning outcome of the story-based pedagogy

- iii) The poetry workshop by Smitha Nair was a remarkable learning experience. The language teachers were empowered to nurture their poetry writing. It taught me to express ideas and present my thoughts. It

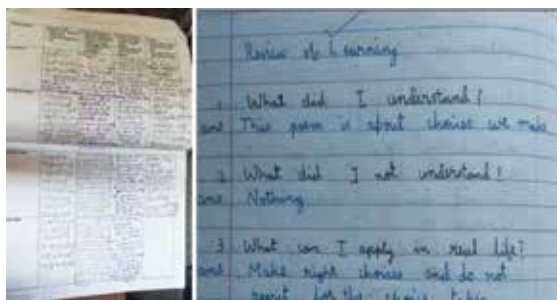


enabled me to conduct a 'Poetry Week' at school independently and introduce different kinds of poetry to the students. The learning from the workshop became a part of subject enrichment activities for our students.



Work from the poetry workshop

One of the in-house sessions that I benefited immensely from was a session on 'time-management.' These series of sessions were designed, planned, and executed by the teachers based on a need-analysis that was done. This session helped improve our productivity and helped the students with setting goals and achieving them.



Self-assessment and goal setting done by a student

Participation in professional development workshops offered by the school not only made me competent and confident in acquiring new skills but developed an urge to learn more. The course conducted by TISS on Mentoring for Teacher Professional Development went beyond acquiring the communication, leadership or interpersonal skills for me. It enthused me to collaborate and come up with new ideas and prepare for a future leadership role. Being part of all these workshops created a quest for self-improvement, led me to attend workshops on my own. When I started teaching senior school, I felt the need to have a structured plan for

language teaching. This led me to take up a course on Communicative English Language Teaching from TISS.

The turning point in my teaching journey was when I became part of a reading program initiated by our school along with external resource people. The immersive book reading session was a great learning experience, wherein I learnt how personal experiences can make learning more relatable for students and integrate multidisciplinary and experiential learning to it. The very next year, I was able to work independently with my students on another book reading session whether it was planning activities or connecting it with real-life situations that gave me a sense of responsibility and self-reliance.



Display of student work after the immersive reading program

Teacher development will not be possible without the school's initiative. It begins with the school management having the vision. I was lucky to have worked with a principal who strongly believed in continuous professional development of the teachers.

Achieving a healthy work-life balance is very important for the sustainable growth of a teacher. I find myself very lucky to have a supportive family and colleagues who helped me overcome the challenges that I faced.

When the school invests in the teachers, it provides them with the opportunity to evaluate their own teaching-learning practices and sustain their personal and professional growth. Teachers too have to take the opportunities that come their way and be open-minded to learn. I have enrolled for workshops on my own having seen the benefits of attending such programs and seeing their impact on the students.

I resonate with Alvin Toffler's quote "The illiterate of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century are not those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn." One of the most important skills that we need to teach our students is to be life-long learners and it is the responsibility of the teachers to model it for them.

# Learning to teach, teaching to learn

Anuja Venkataraman

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My first assignment as a teacher was with a class of four-year-olds in an alternative school. I was both excited and nervous, but also hopeful that my teacher training course had taught me sufficiently to meet the challenges of teaching. Little did I know that my learning journey had only just begun. Every new day, topic, student, session brought manifold challenges and reminded me of the need to take advice from books, the internet, and people.

With time, I took comfort in knowing that I am not alone. A question faced by many teachers is how can we do justice to the wonderful opportunity to make a positive difference in young people's lives? How do we keep ourselves updated so we can support our students in the best ways possible? How do we keep up the spirit of curiosity and excitement of learning that we first began our teaching journey with? Through this article I will share experiences and attempts that have been useful for me to grow and better myself as a teacher.

## Attitude of learning

Feeling joy in learning is as crucial for a teacher as it is for a child. But our stressful, busy schedules require us to discern and prioritize the most important things and identify our current areas of interest. Do I need to learn everything? What do I want to learn now? How do I decide?

There are many ways to approach this. One that I have experienced often is that something comes up in the classroom and we recognize the need to know more. At no point can a teacher know and be equipped to handle everything. Continuous improvement is a good philosophy to work with.

## Learning as an alternative school teacher

In my first school, there was tremendous emphasis on learning using multiple intelligences (MI). My role involved dealing with very young children and exposing them to a variety of content via games and MI-based activities. The second alternative school I was part of was democratically run with guiding principles of equality and respect for all. The role required being a mentor or friend to the children. Adults were expected to hold back and let children take the lead and committees of children and adults worked on running different functions of the school. Conflicts were handled without teachers or adults as the deciding authority. Children could take time to do project work that included carpentry, sewing,

cooking, etc., and that demanded that the facilitators learn and support activities that were out of their comfort zone.

I faced multiple questions when working in these alternative school spaces. One was questions around the specifics of applying a freedom schooling philosophy to young children and to understand what it means to you as a teacher. Another was how can a teacher support children's emotional ups and downs. A third category of questions revolved around classroom management activities like balancing discipline, fairness, and productive work, trying to enable every child to feel that they have gained something and not feel ignored or sidelined or worse. I felt a need to learn more about specific content areas – theory, skills, applications, relating to real life, etc.

There was a need to reflect, remain curious and work diligently to respond to these questions in my search for directions and solutions.

### Actions taken to learn

Many actions were needed to keep updated with the new ideas and skills needed in this novel environment. General ways included calling experts, suggesting topics and participating in trainings organized monthly, picking up library books, clarifying doubts and raising questions, reflecting on practices, having conversations, learning alongside children, and not assuming a position of knowledge, observing other teachers teaching and collaborating.

Examples of learning for specific challenges are shared below.

**Understanding and applying the school philosophy:** My school was influenced by the ideas of Daniel Greenberg, founder of Sudbury Valley school, USA. Its philosophy permeated every area of functioning – from democratic processes, conversations, decision-making, which involved seeing all school members as equal regardless of age, freedom for all students and faculty to plan their day without being strictly bound by time-tables, tight schedules decided by someone else, etc.

I read books and articles on the philosophy, watched YouTube videos to learn more about the systems and how they are implemented. This helped visualize and form an outline of how one can approach freedom. Discussions with colleagues and students added multiple perspectives. Working with systems like school parliament, or committees that took care of different aspects of the school using group decision-making and equality, supported exercising freedom with an open, curious mind, helped me understand and practice, try, succeed or fail, and learn from experience. Reflection and maintaining a journal, bringing up one's questions and views for discussions in team meetings, not only on things to do, but also philosophy and how to translate it in practice, helped.

I read and compared our way with the Montessori system to find parallels, contrasts, or ideas. Attended teacher retreats around alternative teaching and learnt about ideas on de-schooling by thinkers like Ivan Ilyich. I read on child psychology, democracy, freedom, communication, equality, etc., and authors like John Dewey, Tagore, and J Krishnamurthy. Visiting other schools, attending



talks, conferences helped to stay updated with current conversations on education.

**Support children and self emotionally:** To support children's emotional ups and downs, we invited psychologists and counsellors who could share their insights in child psychology and development. Counsellors were invited to conduct short/long-term workshops for facilitators to understand themselves and extend empathy to children. Works by authors like Carl Rogers, Marshal Rosenberg who emphasize creating a listening space for children gave us ideas on how one can support children better – individually, as a group, via conversation. In addition, by reading books together, teachers celebrated the art of book-reading, discussion, and reflecting on what can be applied to their specific situations. Short-term online courses on MOOC platforms like Coursera were another useful source of information. For example, a course called 'Effective Classroom Interactions: Supporting Young Children's Development' focused on helping teachers offer emotionally supportive interactions to the children in their care. Having regular one-on-one conversations with children while doing some activity together like playing with Lego blocks or drawing are examples of some of the many ways to bond with children.

Upon encountering situations of a child hitting or biting, we tried to find ways and routines to calm, or deal with it empathically. Approaches like non-violent communication, sources like websites, books, videos, trainings, practice groups, discussions in staff meetings helped.

### **Classroom management:**

Classroom management was a tricky area because behaviourist methods to establish and maintain discipline are popular by default and any attempt to work with students in a more empathic, or 'soft' manner seems risky, noisy and time-consuming to many. Notions like 'if you are soft with them, they will sit on your head' are believed and teachers use methods like raising their voice, using positive or negative reinforcement to establish pin-drop silence and a room of children sitting firmly in their designated places in a disciplined, learning classroom.

Alternative schooling expects a softer form of classroom management that gives every child equal opportunity to participate and treat disrupting children with humanity, kindness, and understanding. Teachers are expected to try to empathically understand why students behave in a certain way and not directly jump to using punishment or penalty to discourage disruptive behaviour. To translate these ideas into reality involved learning more about child-centric ways of managing groups of children. We discovered the works of educationists like A.S. Neill and John Holt, and their ideas gave us more conviction that alternate, kinder ways are practical too. I also became curious about the assumptions made by philosophers of education or otherwise, about human nature, children's nature, etc. I learnt about Rousseau and John Locke, and how this question of nature vs nurture doesn't have a single right answer.

Authors like Robert Tauber and Carolyn Evertson have researched and written about different ways of classroom management.

Research has found that teacher burnout, stress, and resignations are contributed by long-term challenges around classroom indiscipline and management. To address certain challenges, one may need to do one's own research, look for articles and books specific to a topic using databases like JStor, Academia, Springer, etc. It is a good idea to keep some time for this extra reading, however challenging and busy our lives are as teachers.

Through reading and discussions, I recognized that classroom management could be approached differently with cooperative learning, project-based learning, etc.

**Content area, pedagogy, assessment:** In an open schooling environment, children showed curiosity in a diverse range of topics from bugs, space, Lego, geography, fire, making slime, balls, learning a new language, song, etc. To be able to keep up and facilitate their learning, I had to search, browse books in the school library, lookout for interesting books in bookshops, search online, hunt for quality YouTube videos, talk to other teachers, experts, and attend teacher workshops.

I would ask other teachers about pedagogies they use, learn about using approaches like multiple intelligences, learning by doing, enquiry model, project-based learning, peer-learning, self-directed learning, using books, websites, Google searches, research papers, etc.

I learnt to make and write down observations and process what is happening. When there was confusion about what exactly we





are supposed to observe, templates of learning indicators, assessment criteria of different boards helped. Attending trainings on specific subjects helped in learning new ways, perspectives, and meeting other teachers.

For using multiple intelligences as a part of content and pedagogy, I read articles, book extracts, had discussions with colleagues who were well-versed with it, and asked questions. A cycle of thinking of different areas of using multiple intelligences, trying to use those ideas in lesson plans, seeing them in action, and reflection helped.

**Perspectives on education:** Keeping up with thoughts on educational questions and policies is important to give a context and meaning to its larger goal. I joined courses like 'The future of education' by University of London on Coursera to know how they see the direction in which education is and should

head. Joining social media groups on alternative education, book reading, helped build a network of minds and thoughts who helped one keep in touch with the latest. Need for deeper perspective while teaching is what led me to do an MA in Education and it opened my eyes to the different purposes, contexts, challenges, and approaches to education.

### Creating goals and projects for self-growth

While one is busy keeping up with the demands of the moment, teaching can feel very inspired if one can work on a 'passion project' that involves a mixture of learning and doing. For example, I felt a deep urge to do something for my school that is aligned to something I was very interested in – publishing a book. This led to a co-operative project involving students and teachers to bring out a book celebrating five years of the school's existence. The project drove learning about skills needed

to manage multiple groups, designing and laying out pages, writing, proof-reading, graphics, etc. A project like this helps everyone learn together.

### Research and teaching

My current job has a mixture of action research and pure research in the field of conflict resolution in education. The challenge is to find relevant readings, translate them into practical life, and use some ideas to teach. Using the university's (Azim Premji University) online and offline library, attending talks and presentations, storing potentially interesting reading material by creating organized folders, accessing online papers, magazines, songs, attending conferences, talking to people helps.

### Conclusion

Teacher training had prepared me intellectually, but little did I realize then that teaching is a lifelong journey of learning and reflection – emotionally, skill-wise, content-wise, identity-wise. Challenges are of various types and arise continually. It is these challenges that prompt us to learn more and feel confident. As one teaches, the challenges point to areas we need to learn more about. The main thing is to remember we owe our best to the children we are associated with.

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# Being a lifelong learner

Agnes Dcosta

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Three and a half decades ago, I began my formal journey as a teacher. For nine years, I taught mathematics and science to high school learners and then moved on to teach in a B.Ed college. This is my 36<sup>th</sup> year as a teacher and as I reflect on this long journey, scenes from the past unfold before my eyes. Unlike the two-minute reels on popular networking sites, the reel of my journey as a teacher gives me the liberty of pausing certain moments and reliving the happy memories. What strikes me the most is that this journey of teaching has actually been a journey of learning, of innovation, and empowerment.

## E-power to empower

When I began teaching, I was fortunate to learn from the Christian Brothers, who administered the school I taught at. In the late 1980s, computers were introduced as a subject in school. The school principal, Br. Martin Fernandes, encouraged us teachers to learn the computer. That was the start of a fascinating saga of self-empowerment for me. The decade of the 1990s brought the internet to us and it literally was 'Net-Set-Go'. Many new avenues for self-learning opened up and I voraciously gorged on these. The first decade of the new millennium saw the use of Web 1.0, where I was a consumer of the content. But the latter half of this decade unfolded the beauty of Web 2.0, where I was now a prosumer (producer and consumer) of the content.



Photo courtesy: Agnes Dcosta

During the course of my doctoral research, my guide Dr. Veena Deshmukh introduced me to the magical world of online learning. This was around 2006-2008 and online learning was indeed magic to me! Yeshwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University had launched a new programme called E-B.Ed. Under the mentoring of Dr. Veena Deshmukh and stalwarts in the field of education like Prof. Ram Takwale and Prof. M N Deshmukh, our team designed and deployed online modules in teacher education. This endeavour helped me keep myself updated about changes in education. In 2010, I enrolled for a course by Wikieducator and discovered the enormous potential of Open Education Resources (OERs). This voyage of learning saw some happy sailing as I learnt about Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and Learning Management Systems (LMS). I dabbled with many free platforms and created MOOCs and OERs. My modus operandi would be to explore e-platforms, see how they work and then deploy the same to reach out to my students. Blended learning and flipped classroom were now part of my daily vocabulary. Many times, my students and I would be part of the same MOOCs and we all learnt from one another.

Then in 2020 came the pandemic! All educators were forced to shift to the online mode. My experience of Web 2.0 provided solutions to many challenges. The lockdown was a period of learning. My students would often recommend some e-platforms and we would jointly see how these could be used for constructivist learning. Many in-service teachers were apprehensive about using online learning, so I designed and deployed training sessions

for teachers. Over 500 teachers participated in the sessions and faced the unprecedented situation with equanimity by using basic e-learning tools to reach out to their students.

Lockdown introduced me to new avenues as I discovered the nuances of virtual and augmented learning. Machine learning and artificial intelligence in education unfolded a whole new world of customized learning experiences. All these were moments of great satisfaction for me. I realized that staying updated as a teacher means one has to be a perennial learner. Being updated as a teacher also calls for putting oneself in the reflective practitioner mode.

### Takeaways as a reflective practitioner

Teachers, as reflective practitioners, systematically reflect on their practice to improve their own performance as well as that of their learners. As I reflect over the key takeaways from my journey so far, I identify five lessons that I value the most.

- **Keep looking for ways to grow:** Teachers, as reflective practitioners, need to keep looking for ways to renew themselves. Leverage the potential of online learning. Central Institute of Educational Technology (CIET), NCERT offers a number of training programmes that one can access from the comfort of one's home. Till date, I have participated in a number of such programmes and have benefitted immensely.
- **Connect and collaborate:** As a teacher, always strive to be surrounded by people who inspire you. Connect with teachers who are passionate about their work. Collaborate and try new ways to help learners explore what they learn. Build your own personal learning network to help you in your journey.

- **Respect the potential of each learner:** I have learnt that mere marks do not define a person. The boy in my class who struggled to get 50% marks is a successful entrepreneur today. The boy, who was shy to speak in front of a crowd, is a human resource trainer in a reputed firm. Never undermine the riches that learners carry within themselves. As teachers, we can provide them the right support, direct them towards the right track and they will bloom!
- **Share and grow:** If you have some good practices in teaching-learning, share them with others. This could be through informal meetings or through formal ways like blogging or writing for a magazine. In this context, I would like to acknowledge *Teacher Plus*, as it was the first magazine where I got published, back in 2009. This motivated me to write regularly and each article I wrote helped me learn. Remember, the more we share the more we grow.
- **Choose to be grateful:** A quote attributed to Sir Isaac Newton says, "If I have seen further than others, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." Indeed, we are successful teachers because of those who helped us learn. This includes our parents, teachers, students, peers, authors, and a host of other people who have directly and indirectly helped us create a niche for ourselves. It is not joy that makes us grateful, rather it is gratitude that makes us joyful. So, choose to be grateful for your vocation as a teacher. Touching the lives of your students is the best way to express gratitude to those who touched your life.

On this occasion of Teacher's Day, I extend my wishes to all readers who are connected with this noble vocation of nurturing young minds.

# Teaching Gen Z

Adithi Muralidhar

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The year was 2001. It was a rainy morning in August. I was carrying a heavy bag over which I had draped a raincoat. I was also carrying an umbrella, but alas, by the time I reached school, which was only a 10 minute walk away, I was drenched. Rainy days were days on which I found school most boring. For one, all physical education periods were cancelled. Not only did I find myself dull on a cloudy and dark morning, I seemed more distracted by the pitter patter outside than the chatter inside the classroom. But my day was better if we began with a biology class and my day was not so good if we began with a maths class. Such was the power of a subject and its teacher. Biology was a subject that I looked forward to during my school days. I also adored the teacher who taught it. She had a booming voice, which could capture even the sleepest of the kids, was articulate in her descriptions, and drew resplendent diagrams on the blackboard which brought biology alive for me. However, in retrospect, the classroom followed a somewhat traditional trajectory. There was a topic at hand, the teacher drew the necessary diagrams on the blackboard, followed by an explanation of everything she drew. She summarized her teachings and the class ended. Everything that the teacher narrated in the class that day would be something new, something unheard of, and at times something that blew your mind.

Fast forward to 2018, I happened to be (as a non-participant) observing an 8<sup>th</sup> grade science classroom, where an energetic teacher was following the same pattern of teaching that I described above. The topic was very alluring, but the interest among the children dwindled. The teacher though very enthusiastic and articulate could not keep a grasp on the children's diminishing attention. This made me reflect on all the things that had changed since the 2000s and how that has affected teaching and learning in school setups.

We are of course, now more aware about the developments in teaching-learning methods, thanks to the mounting evidence that comes from the domain of educational research. Scholars working in this area have provided insightful direction on how pedagogy and curriculum may be improved so as to make learning more relevant, authentic, and meaningful for students. However, even if we consider a teacher who has "updated" her teaching methods, there are still some areas which are difficult to address. I will discuss a few examples (observed in an urban context), where a teacher may face dilemmas while teaching the Gen Z – children born between the end



of last century and the first decade of this one (1007-2012). All of these issues are equally pressing in a rural context, but the degree, expanse, and exposure to these issues will be different from that of an urban setting.

*Back in the day, it was the teacher who had the answer to everything. Anything that she taught in class was new, refreshing, and different. We would passively absorb knowledge.*

### **Today's scenario: Children come armed with information**

But today we are living in an era where children have information at the click of a button. If the teacher is teaching about the structure of the kidney, all the student has to do is type "structure of a kidney" in Google search and lo! you have your entire topic summarized with diagrams in a second. In addition to this, you have more children going to tuitions where these topics are "covered earlier" leaving the child almost nothing "new" to learn. Not to mention, ChatGPT, the AI-powered language model has taken the world by storm and the implications of this in education sector is far-reaching.

### **Challenges for the teacher**

So how does the teacher negotiate between covering the topics of the syllabus while also delivering something "new" to the children? How can the motivation to learn something new be retained in the classroom? More importantly, how does a teacher address a situation when a student is asking something to which the teacher does not have a response? Is it ok to say, I don't know? How would children react to that? Will they think I don't know anything? Do I tell them – I don't have time to address your question now... will they see through my attempt to ignore their question? Will they judge me? Or shall I retort with an angry comment that shuts down their questions? These are some of the questions that rise in the minds of teachers when posed with a similar situation. It can be daunting.

*Before, it was almost impossible to address the diversity among children in the classroom. In a class of 60-70, you would come across children with different learning styles, who had different personalities, who came from different cultural backgrounds*

*and had varying interests. In fact, there was a time when we ourselves were oblivious to issues surrounding adolescents, mental health, gender, sexuality, emotional health, etc., and they did not find a space in the school discourse.*

### **Today's scenario: Being sensitive to and addressing diversity**

However, now-a-days, teachers and parents in urban schools are more exposed to the nuances of this diversity (at least to a certain extent) and therefore there is scope to address it. For example, we hear about cases of children facing depression and anxiety due to exams, or we come across cases of bullying, or issues pertaining to adolescents and mental health. Exposure to these instances helps the teacher become more perceptive to her children and identify occasions which may need her intervention. This is a good practice, but it is also challenging.

### **Challenges for the teacher**

So now, in addition to being sensitive to the diversities of a heterogeneous classroom, there are other aspects a teacher needs to be perceptive and sensitive about. But are teachers equipped to address such scenarios? Say a teacher sees one girl bullying another girl because "she is behaving like a boy". How should the teacher address this situation? How is a teacher expected to deal with sensitive issues around gender identity when children themselves are at a stage where they are learning about themselves?

*The most sophisticated form of technology that we engaged with during our school time was a desktop computer.*



Artwork: Shilpy Lather  
Photos courtesy: [www.freepik.com](http://www.freepik.com)



### Today's scenario: Keeping up with technology

Today children are exposed to android phones, tabs, Bluetooth devices, and gadgets that have completely transformed the way they interact with their peers as well as teachers. They easily figure out how to use apps like Instagram, Threads, SnapChat, Facebook, etc., and at the same time struggle with a simple table-top experiment in a science class. On the contrary, there are also situations where a mundane science experiment is not motivating enough for the children to engage with, because they find it undemanding of their mental faculties. I was attending a major science exhibition event last year and I saw this middle school student with his phone perched on a selfie-stick. He was recording a video for his "YouTube channel" near the stall which was showcasing a liquid nitrogen demonstration. I wondered if the marvel of nitrogen gas excited

him as much as his cell phone's features.

### Challenges for the teacher

How does a teacher engage children in relevant interactions in the classroom with and without the usage of such technology? Is a teacher expected to compete with these technological gadgets that hold children (and even adults for that matter) hostage to the screen?

*Biases have always been embedded in our thoughts and actions. All of us, including children, are influenced by our parents, peer community, and society at large. But a teacher also had a strong influence on children back in the days.*

### Today's scenario: Breaking biases

With the increased amount of exposure to media and internet, I have noticed that children have started to form very strong opinions about scientific concepts

and social issues from a very young age. Some children seem convinced that they know the right answer because Google said so. Others seem to have opinions on social, political, and environmental issues which they feel are one hundred per cent correct. I remember, during the pandemic, a child had mentioned that because of China, the whole world was suffering. This issue in particular created a huge debate even among the adult population.

### Challenges for the teacher

How do we go about breaking these strong notions that children have? When the answers to questions are complex and beyond one-word, how can we convey the same to children? With the amount of media content they imbibe each day, how can teachers make them unlearn the wrongs in a 35 minute class?

### Parting thoughts

With the increasingly changing world which has been moving leaps and bounds in a matter of just a few years, the exposures and experiences of children are evolving. The expectations from a teacher have also been expanding to match these changing times. A teacher's job has always been rewarding but challenging. However, the challenges of teaching Gen Z are multi-fold and complex. The points raised in this article are merely the tip of the iceberg. In fact, these will overlap with other socio-cultural issues that already factor into the teaching-learning process. But it leaves us thinking about how one should negotiate the complex parameters of today's world and make learning a meaningful and joyful experience for children.

There is no one solution to this. But for starters, it is important that teachers are open and accepting of these new dimensions in their schools, be it exposure to new technology or the evolving dynamics of the society. It is also important to constantly remind oneself that nobody knows everything. We are all constantly learning and updating our knowledge. Teachers are also in the same basket. Professional training of teachers can include specific components on diversity so that teachers are not only aware but have some know-how of how they may deal with sensitive situations. When it comes to learning new technology, it is not necessary that it is always the teacher who imparts new knowledge. Perhaps we can look for opportunities where students "teach" their teachers about the changing technologies. Lastly, in order to have a more holistic understanding of issues and topics, and therefore disintegrate strong biases, teachers could possibly engage their class in more dialogic teaching, argumentation, and discussing socio-scientific issues. These are some possible ways in which the teacher can sow the seeds for critical thinking and reasoning. Such formats of classroom discourse help bring in multiple perspectives which can challenge biases and stereotypical notions in the classroom. At the end, it is also important to remember that teachers stand to gain a lot of support if they have a peer community with whom they can share their concerns. Not all support and peer groups may offer solutions, but knowing that there are other teachers having similar challenges may help one see things in fresher perspectives and rise up to the challenges of teaching Gen Z.

**Disclaimer:** This article is an experiential and anecdotal account, and is purely based on personal observations and experiences.

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# Going with the flow

Arvind Dhondphale

The author is an artist and sculptor from Pune. He has worked as an art educator for more than 20 years. He developed his interest in 'child art' when he was in Sir J. J. School of Art, Mumbai. Currently, he is exploring various aspects of art education and the process of learning in The Peepal Grove School, Andhra Pradesh. He can be reached at [arvind.dhondphale@gmail.com](mailto:arvind.dhondphale@gmail.com).

How do I update myself? Where do the updates come from? Am I making myself available to these updates? These are the questions that come to mind when I think about updating myself. Updating oneself constantly is an important requirement of growing as a learner. Updating is learning new aspects and perspectives.

In the pre-COVID times, I was fortunate to have participated in international summits and conferences, which proved to be big updating boosters for me. I was selected to participate in the Maverick Teachers Global Summit once. In this event I met, interacted, and worked with educationists and education researchers from various countries. This gave me a broad outlook on education in Europe, Africa, and Asia. I also had the chance to present papers at the International Conference for Design Pedagogy and Contextual Aesthetics – Thanima 2 and 3. Here I met and listened to many people who are experimenting with traditional and modern educational approaches. This made me re-think, learn and come up with a totally new approach to teach my subject. Having gained deeper insights into environmental changes and social scenarios around the world and learnt how education can play an important role in coming up with solutions, I now incorporate art exercises that will help children connect with nature. Including experiential learning in my pedagogy is helping my students to think and come up with solutions to real life problems. They are also learning the importance of *jugaad* or reusing waste materials.

## A boom in the sharing of ideas

During the lockdown, when the world came to a standstill, webinars became the easiest means of sharing thoughts and ideas. I attended many webinars, which gave me the opportunity to listen to educators, researchers, school owners, parents, and teachers. This helped me get a better picture of the education scenario in our country. Podcasts\* have made it easy to watch and listen to educators, subject experts, policy makers, researchers, scientists, etc. We are now able to listen to them, know their thoughts and viewpoints. There are many YouTube channels as well that keep you updated.

\*Podcasts: Scoonews, ANI podcast, BeerBiceps  
YouTube videos of Abhijit Chavda, Praveen Mohan, The Sanskrit channel, Mati India  
News channels like Better India  
Websites Jinan K B, Agastya Foundation, Kuppam campus



### Online courses

Online courses have become quite popular. I am very curious about art therapy and colour therapy. Whenever and wherever possible I try to learn about them. During lockdown, I got the opportunity to learn about these therapies. They opened up a whole new approach towards life and art education. What I learnt is helping me understand not only children but also their emotions. I am now able to develop exercises on the senses, how we see colour, how we can express our emotions, what lines express, what and how different shapes and forms communicate different emotions, etc. These courses added to my knowledge.

### Art updates

As an artist I keep working on my art and skills related to it. I sculpt, paint, and draw on a regular basis. This helps me develop my skills to express myself better and to realize the deeper aspects of life. It helps me stay connected with the inner 'me'. It is like staying updated with myself.

### Exploring new paths

Experimenting with teaching methods has become one of my most favourite things over time as an educator. I try to come up with new ideas to develop exercises. Since last year we have initiated experiential learning in our school. It provided both teachers and students with opportunities to explore deeper learning.

I started a 'dialogue group' for teachers. We used to meet once a week for an hour. In these meetings, if one of us had a question, the rest would try and find the answer, or we would discuss classroom situations, or read articles or extracts from books and have discussions. This practice

discontinued when regular school activities increased post COVID. We now take up the activities of the dialogue group during some of our school staff meetings. The dialogue group has helped all of us understand various aspects and open up for healthy dialogue.

On one occasion I proposed that teachers switch their subjects and conduct classes for a totally different subject for a week. Many teachers warmed up to the idea and came forward to participate. So a language teacher would take classes in geography, a mathematics teacher would teach social sciences and so on. We took efforts to plan the exercise carefully. Once the subjects and grade levels were decided we started our preparations with the help of the subject teachers. We selected grades 7 and 8 for this activity. The activity went very well, providing children and teachers with rich experiences and added fun to the process of learning.

As an art educator I take art students to art galleries, handicraft melas, art museums, etc. This helps me encourage art students to take art seriously and choose creative fields for their higher studies. These visits help keep me updated with the art scenario and art field.

Flowing is life and stagnation is death. Keeping myself updated is like flowing with life. In this journey, if I am able to keep myself open I also receive the answers to many of my questions. Updating also is a form of openness to the changes of life. These thoughts encourage me to explore life as well as help me meet the latest version of myself.



Illustration: Arvind Dhondaphale

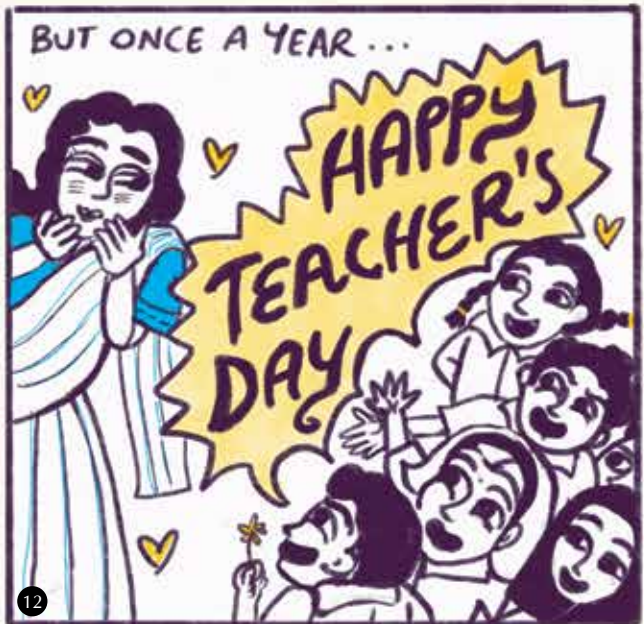
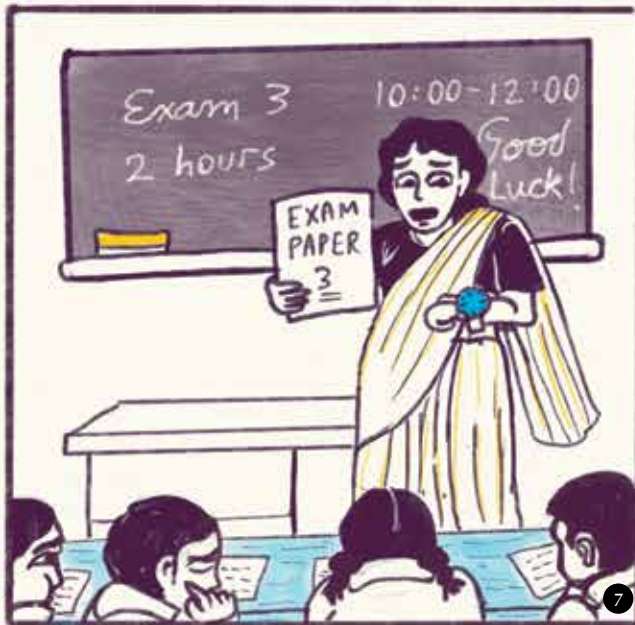


# A teacher's day

Alia Sinha









# The craft and the art of teaching joyfully

**Shree Deepa**

The author is an associate professor in the Centre for English Language Studies, University of Hyderabad. She has been a school teacher in the earlier years of her career. Her current research interests include language potentiality, equitable, inclusive education, anthropogenicity, teacher education, materials development and testing. She supervises research in English language teaching and education. She can be reached at [shreedeepta@uohyd.ac.in](mailto:shreedeepta@uohyd.ac.in).

Once a teacher, always a teacher. Being a teacher is not a job but a personality trait or our persona that we tend to take with us wherever we go. As teachers, we are easily identifiable as has happened to me often. Our mind perpetually makes connections about how this incident, or that, can be turned into a teaching-learning experience for our students. This is where we try to spice up our classrooms with our wisdom as an ingredient. An informed, well-read, up-to-date teacher is incomplete unless her wisdom is added to her classroom hours. We must ask ourselves whether 'teaching' is an art or a craft before we look at stabilizing ourselves in this profession. Degrees, diplomas, and training sessions make it a craft, but if we have yearned to be a teacher, and have started enjoying our profession, we are on our way to making it an art. The craft of teaching is easy to pick up, but maintaining it as an art requires our conscious engagement with the craft by adding creative dimensions to it so that we enjoy ourselves. Any profession requires us to stay updated and focused in our discipline and keep ourselves in the loop of new developments in the field. This, however, is easier said than done. How do we keep ourselves updated? It sounds difficult, but is actually very easy. I am going to reflect on my own experiences and use them as examples of how I stayed updated.

As a child, I always thought I would be a doctor or a teacher. All my playtime was spent role playing these two professions alternately. I could not get into the medical profession but went on to do my graduation in microbiology, botany, and chemistry. After my graduation, my first job was that of a schoolteacher, where I began my career as an 'untrained' teacher because I did not have a 'B.Ed'. Since I did not like being called, termed, and treated as an 'untrained'



Photos courtesy: Shree Deepa



teacher, I went ahead to pick up degrees in education that served to hone my teaching skills with the necessary theoretical backgrounds that strengthened them. Later on, I had to shift to the discipline of language and literature teaching as my master's degrees and diplomas were in this field. This accounted for teaching as a craft for me. I was still restless unless my teaching included the artistic perspective because it always excited me to go that extra mile to make every class of mine a memorable performance. This was done not to score brownie points from the principal or parents but to keep me on the satisfaction graph and free me from the monotonous droning or data-dumping exercises that are paraded as teaching hours. The one thing I always consciously did was to find ways of teaching in class that kept me excited every day of my career. Often I had to repeat the courses that I had taught previously. Since I get bored quickly by monotony, I made sure I did things very differently from the previous time or improvised on earlier successful class hours whenever such course repetition had to happen.



This internal compulsion of 'trying-to-beat-boredom' and better my best propelled me to constantly look for ways of making my classroom teaching-learning experiences interesting for me and my students. I would look for ideas everywhere, way beyond the classroom hours or the academic calendar and keep a diary of all the ideas. Sometimes the ideas came when I shopped in the vegetable market or a

supermarket. I would pick up pamphlets, newspaper inserts, and newspaper articles for classroom materials. This economics worked out well because these were freely available and did not cost me any money. I would discuss with my co-teachers how they made their classrooms exciting and adapt from their suggestions if they seemed plausible. I would activate multidisciplinary, which came as a craft due to my excellent academic track record as a student, to spice up my classes. Sometimes I would read books that had a bunch of 'idea tasks' or five-minute tasks, surf the internet, or try to repeat the tasks that were used as ice-breakers in teacher training workshops. I would understand the demands and needs of my students and adapt, or adopt from my experiences as the task-taker and modify them to suit my students. These exercises and the mindset behind such an act by the teacher will help her hone her skill sets while motivating her to add the artistic element to keeping herself updated professionally. No amount of training or the number



of degrees that we pick up will compensate for this mindset.

Staying up-to-date as a teacher is a multipronged approach; it is not just what we can/will do, but linked with who we are as teachers. It is the right attitudinal mindset that will prod us to outperform our previous performances. This mindset will create newer and creative untrodden paths and also foster divergent thinking. Such a mindset in the teacher will automatically inspire the students to think and act creatively. Artistically creative teachers foster and reward originality in the teaching-learning processes. It does not matter what the sources are, but a resourceful teacher is an artist who is deft in the craft of teaching.

The goal of education in 2023 lies in creating thinkers that are original in their ideas because data-dumping and content-regurgitations are outsourced to search engines and Wikipedia; we need to wake up to the reality of artificial intelligence that is becoming more human-like in its responses. As teachers of this generation, we need to focus and work on changing our mindset and merge the craft and the art of teaching so as to protect human



originality from the realities and intrusions of artificial intelligence. Let us assume that as teachers, we are progressive and we are able to practice divergent, vertical, horizontal, and lateral thinking in everyday teaching. When this happens all of us will build a generation of students who will not only be prepared to handle technological advances but think of living their lives in meaningful divergent ways. The technological advances of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are here to stay, and we cannot compete memory-wise with its data-holding capacity. However, as humans in this day and age, we need to be wiser than what machines can

offer on various platforms. The paths to this destination can come from educating ourselves through training workshops, self-taught skill development or reading in the area and/or doing certified courses – the destination matters, not the path. But such courses will only contribute to the craft of teaching. Teaching-learning can and will become joyful and satisfying for both the teacher and the students if we merge the art and the craft with a dash of our wisdom gathered through our experiences. We have to put back smiles on the faces of our students and any effort to do that is a worthwhile pursuit in the life of a teacher, and no step can be seen as complete if that joy is removed from the classroom space. We need to move from perceiving our teaching as a chore, to not just fulfilling it as a craft, but enjoying and experiencing it as an art. We owe our students that much!

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# Planned, or unplanned, we learn all the time

**Madhulika S Naidu**

The author is a consultant in the space of curriculum, instruction, pedagogy, andragogy, and educational research. She works with nascent and experienced educational organizations to either build the curricular and pedagogy portfolio of the organization from scratch or support an organization in the process of overhauling their existing curricular process and structure. Madhulika S Naidu also works in the domains of critical perspectives, phenomenology, semiotics, constructivism, cultural colonialism, ethnographic, and vernacular learning in her research and practice. She can be reached at [anandastudio.in@gmail.com](mailto:anandastudio.in@gmail.com).

Teaching as a profession provides various opportunities to empower ourselves to be a better facilitator, counsellor, or even listener. Teaching demands that the person should have various attributes like the ability to listen to various perspectives, expertise in pedagogy, felicity in relaying subject matter, facilitate complicated conversations and create an inclusive environment in the classroom. Teacher development is thus a very important aspect of professional development in the field of teaching and learning.

Learning is loosely defined as a constructive, dynamic organization of complex understandings. Learning results from multiple sources and engages the whole person not just the mind and contributes to the individual's development. It is prompted by feedback and occurs in reference to new experiences registered by the body, mind, emotion, and awareness. The impact of learning is

related to its significance on the contexts of experience. Learning from experiences, especially, adds a unique meaning, creating diversity among adult learners. Adult learners start with an initial base of knowledge and experience and build on it. They interact with the broader intellectual or community life through considerable engagement, work, reading, discussions, and conversations. All learners work from this point to build a more meaningful understanding of the subject matter or concept and improve their ability to ask questions and find answers. Adult learners, like teachers and teacher educators, should immerse themselves in informal learning opportunities.

There are three types of informal learning: self-directed learning, incidental learning, and tacit learning. The differences among the three have been attributed to intentionality and awareness at the time of the experience. Self-directed learning has been characterized as being intentional and conscious and hence is the most visible and studied. You visit an exhibition, a fair, a museum, or an art gallery; the form of learning is self-directed. Incidental learning may be an accidental by-product of another activity and is usually unintentional but creates awareness after the incident, i.e., it occurs unplanned and is emergent. The third form of informal learning, tacit learning, is



neither intentional nor conscious although there is a possibility of awareness in retrospection. Tacit learning happens naturally whether you have planned it or not; it is the form of learning that is inherent to our existence. This article takes the reader through the various forms of informal learning at their disposal and the varied ways in which they can enhance their professional development opportunities.

### 1. Self-directed and initiated learning

Self-directed and initiated learning rarely occurs in singularity in splendid isolation from the world in which the learner lives; it is intimately related to that world and affected by it. It has been discussed widely that self-direction in learning is a natural part of adult life. However, it is imperative to acknowledge that even though the initial process can be self-directed, the latter half of the learning is usually associated with people who are knowledgeable about the process and involves retrospection and self-reflection.

This form of learning can include “the spontaneous, unstructured learning that goes on daily in the home and neighborhood, behind the school and on the

playing field, in the workplace, marketplace, library and museum, and through the various mass media. Such learning has also been called “everyday learning” because it takes place in very private and non-organized contexts of life. In the form of self-initiated and directed learning, informal learning is embedded in our mundane activities, and we fail to characterize it or give it the importance it deserves. This form of learning is something teachers should engage in with great fervor and find opportunities to learn from! Self-directed and initiated learning experiences, interaction in such learning environments and the plethora of stepping stones it provides for professional development should be an integral part of every teacher’s tool kit! A few avenues for self-directed and initiated learning are discussed in the following paragraphs.

#### Attend conferences and workshops

Conferences on teaching and learning provide a fantastic avenue for teachers to improve their purview of what is new in the field, what kind of technology is enhancing the quality of learning experiences. How is pedagogy being used in different disciplines

to help students learn better? Attending such events helps teachers identify contexts for improvement. On the one hand, conferences and workshops are very good networking events and teachers get to exchange best practices. On the other, such venues provide for the fertile intermingling of innovations in pedagogy, curriculum interpretation, and instructional methodologies.

#### Read practice-based articles!

Practice-based articles provide know-how about strategies being used on the ground. Teachers will be in touch with what is working, what is not, what is desirable and what has been tested enough so you do not have to reinvent the wheel again! Best practices in classroom management, classroom etiquette, learning outcomes, experiential learning, assessment vs evaluation and so much more become readily available in a format that is extremely hands-on, reimaged, realigned, and written in a tone and context that is of immediate use to teachers.

#### Visit informal learning venues to upgrade

Museums, art shows, installations, learning festivals, and such





platforms for informal learning provide a ripe environment to observe and imbibe tacit learning as it happens at the venue naturally. This form of informal learning allows the practice of self-directed learning. It enables teachers to incorporate field visits, museum trips and then engage students in self-directed exercises. Teachers will implement self-directed learning as practice only when they have a first-hand experience of the same.

The following paragraphs will expand more on another form of informal learning that happens by chance, without a plan or a set structure in place.

## **2. Incidental learning**

Incidental learning happens by chance, hence the term! It is not planned and neither can you predict the nature and scope of learning; it just happens! This form of learning is quite self-reflective in nature. If initiated, learning is self-directed, then incidental learning is self-reflective. It requires immersion in environments that are of interest and to be understood. Incidental learning is a very potent exercise in understanding how our mundane activities are sources of learning. Learning is an ongoing process, whether we structure an experience or a process or not; learning is inevitable, it happens naturally!

### **Observe natural environments to excel**

Lose your inhibitions in nature, a potent exercise is to stand against the wind and observe what happens to your body, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Likewise, put your feet in a pond for a few minutes, sit with a flower, observe trees and ants. Observation is key to a child's curiosity, allow yourself to delve into this faculty

within yourself. Such a quality of observation allows for a natural disposition to teach science and use method of science effectively. It enables the teacher to embrace embodied learning, learning is not limited to the mind is what observation using the body and natural elements will help you understand.

### **Immerse in local culture to reinvent yourself**

An understanding of local culture is imperative to create appropriate context for pedagogy and facilitation approaches. Local culture dictates the kind of lived experiences your students carry and the mark of the sounds, smells, and sights of their lived experience. If a teacher can understand local culture, it is easy for him/her to place themselves in the students' shoes and empathize with them.

### **Adapt and adopt technology in the classroom**

Technology and applications of technology in education are here to stay. Apart from smart boards, online lesson content and educational apps, there are several other platforms that provide an opportunity to reconfigure yourself with the younger generation. For example, [H5p.com](https://h5p.com). H5P is a free and open-source content collaboration framework based on JavaScript. H5P is an abbreviation for HTML5 Package and aims to make it easy for everyone to create, share, and reuse interactive HTML5 content. H5P empowers everyone to create rich and interactive web experiences. Use H5p to redesign videos and video clips, presentations to include questions, pause when required and ask questions. You could use games in the classroom using this platform to drive a point across or to make an impact!

### **Create rubrics to evaluate and assess student learning**

Rubrics can be used as a guide describing expectations in student assignments and as a scoring tool for instructors. A rubric defines how to evaluate a student's performance based on several criteria rather than a single numerical score. Rubrics have become an especially helpful tool in a diverse teaching and learning environment by providing a wide range of benefits from providing consistent feedback to students to decreasing overall grading time.

## **3. Tacit learning**

Tacit learning is happening constantly without conscious reflection! It is something we can only understand retrospectively, after an event, or occurrence, or the context for learning. Tacit learning is a continuous process, it is not in our awareness most of the time and is of value because it helps us connect the dots. The ability to connect dots effectively is an awareness of tacit learning. Learning to hold learning, this is the ultimate suggestion for all teachers. When we do not understand a topic, or context, or a subject, it is important not to reach a conclusion. Learning to hold information till it emerges as an experience is a faculty of tacit learning. If teachers learn to hold, students will follow suit; otherwise, we tend to throw away the baby with the bath water!!

Learning is an ongoing process; teachers and teacher educators are required to innovate, and in the process, reinvent themselves to empower their students and thereby find social agency in their professional endeavours.

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# A bit of reflection makes all the difference

Anshika Bedi

The author is a specialist educator in the visual arts in Pathways school, Noida. She has been teaching for nearly a decade now and has experience teaching in both urban and rural settings. She can be reached at [anshika.bedi@pathways.in](mailto:anshika.bedi@pathways.in).

So, how do I keep myself updated? A balanced approach towards my professional and personal wellbeing is what helped me grow and improve as a person and as a teacher. The path to self-improvement though is not a fixed one; it is different for each of us. These experiences worked for me as an art educator, hopefully some will work for you too.

## **Retain your excitement and know your passions**

To incorporate passion into your teaching, you must be able to retain your excitement. I started this practice during COVID – recollecting successful teaching moments, events, and activities; this gave me the fuel to take on fresh challenges and walk that extra mile. Remember the excitement, because that is what will help you stay motivated and transfer to your students as fuel to ignite their passion.

From a gym enthusiast, to a passionate cyclist, to a biker, my journey to learn and follow my passions helped me overcome hurdles in my profession as well, so take time out to do what you like.

## **Be part of peer communities**

Being part of the community of art educators, practising artists, art collectors and appreciators has helped me brush up on pedagogy to stay relevant. Being a teacher has also provided me with the insight and perspective to broaden my vision, challenge assumptions, and uncover new opportunities and trends. Furthermore, teaching has helped me develop confidence, self-awareness, and emotional intelligence to enhance communication, collaboration, and leadership abilities.

## **Assess yourself**

Change and evolution require self-awareness. I keep a checklist and make notes of what worked well and how simple modifications can help me perform better. Detecting that something is wrong is the first step towards improvement. I determine what areas of my teaching need the most attention. Before setting up goals or planning and executing my curriculum, I keep in mind my strengths and weaknesses and see how I can create the best learning environment for my students. I challenge myself with some key areas of growth every year and commit to them.

### Be adaptable

This has been a key element to my lessons and helped me grow as a facilitator. Teaching is especially demanding and consistently changing, so being able to respond effectively to an uncertain environment is widely considered an essential ability. I communicate regularly with my students with special abilities to understand their diverse learning needs and sometimes keep my lessons open-ended so that I can handle unexpected situations in the classroom and make changes according to the need. Being able to adjust to new conditions reduces stress and anxiety, and as a result, contributes to the educator's well-being.

### Plan ahead

As I have mentioned earlier, classrooms are unpredictable environments, and consequently one of the many tasks of the teachers is organizing and preparing for what might come up unexpectedly.

Generally, organized educators promote effective learning environments, which will benefit the students. When my classroom runs smoothly and efficiently, that orderly atmosphere contributes to an efficient transfer of knowledge.

Moreover, planning provides a comforting sense of control to me, I feel more confident in my methods and strategies. That is, advanced preparation allows me to consider the possible consequences of what may happen in the classroom. And because of this careful planning, I can avoid overwhelming and stressful situations, which could negatively affect learners' performance in the class.

### Innovate

Visual art lessons require innovation, imagination, and creativity.

Am I an innovative teacher?

- I can think in unique ways to make learning significant and fun.
- I am willing to try new strategies and techniques to achieve students' academic success.
- I can identify potential student struggles and challenges (loss of interest or focus,

lack of understanding, low engagement, demotivation).

- I can find new ways of motivating and encouraging students to successfully meet their objectives.
- I can focus on improving their performance in class.
- I can teach students to question and help them become critical thinkers.
- I can encourage students to take artistic risks.
- I can promote collaborative work.

### Add humour

Finding humour in daily tasks can be the greatest form of art practice. This helps in building relationships with learners. Relationships build trust, which adds to the comfort levels and enables risk taking in learners. When learners are not afraid to try new things, it builds their confidence which is imperative to a successful visual art lesson. Most importantly, it builds strong individuals with strong problem-solving skills who will become successful contributors to society.

### Build an idea bank

An idea bank has always helped me during those days when I am out of creative ideas. I devote a few hours every day to updating myself about new ideas, skills, materials, and products and how these can be incorporated into my teaching practice. This idea bank is a resource from which I just keep mining. Keep collecting and researching, it adds to your learning.

In conclusion, I can say that when a teacher is versatile and willing to develop their craft, they bring into the classroom a flexible learning atmosphere that fosters students' motivation and engagement.

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"I find it overwhelming to navigate the stress of online teaching while managing my personal life, household responsibilities, and even illness."

# Teachers as learners: embracing a paradigmatic shift

"The number of new technologies I had to master during the COVID crisis was unimaginable. However, I persevered and successfully adapted to the new landscape."

"You're fortunate to have good internet speeds. In rural areas, we face challenges accessing reliable internet, which hindered our ability to learn effectively during the two years of the pandemic. Poor connectivity prevented us from attending government training programs."

"When schools reopened, we encountered a significant learning loss. Students had forgotten what they had previously learned, and now we face the challenge of exploring new methods to address this setback."

**Nivedita Bedadur and Anne Isaac**  
(with inputs from Roshan Pradhan and Nandashree Natarajan)

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As COVID-19 unfolded, educators across the globe faced an unprecedented challenge – shifting to online teaching and learning how to do it overnight. This paradigm shift in education required teachers to embrace new pedagogies and technologies, adapting their instructional methods to an entirely new landscape. This sudden transformation demanded not only subject matter expertise (CK) and pedagogical knowledge (PCK), but also technological pedagogical knowledge (TPK), compelling teachers to become both learners and adaptors in the face of adversity.

In the pre-COVID era, teachers relied on various means to acquire new skills and enhance their capabilities. Prominent educational institutions like Kendriya Vidyalayas and state education departments established training wings, specifically designed to



upskill teachers, enabling them to stay updated with the evolving educational landscape. Annual in-service training sessions were conducted by many schools, allowing teachers to acquire new knowledge and teaching techniques. However, in rural and economically disadvantaged city schools, teachers often had to rely on their own devices to keep pace with the rapid changes in education.

COVID-19 thrust online learning, teaching, and training into the spotlight. Even before the pandemic, the Indian government had introduced programs like NISHTHA and DIKSHA to support teacher professional development. However, the effectiveness of these resources varied.

To develop our understanding of how teachers learned during the pandemic, we talked to two administrators – Roshan Pradhan, former vice principal of Deorali Senior Secondary School, Gangtok and Nandashree Natarajan, headmistress of the nursery wing of Sri Kumaran Children's Home, Bengaluru. Roshan and her team found that while DIKSHA was not user-friendly, NISHTHA provided highly interactive training modules for teachers from primary to senior secondary levels, proving to be extremely useful. Teachers all over the country experienced that social media platforms like Zoom and Google Meet played a significant role in facilitating collaboration and knowledge sharing among teachers. The resulting exchange of ideas and best practices proved invaluable as teachers rapidly adapted to new teaching methodologies. It was during this time that the teaching community realized the power of collaboration and innovation, with teachers breaking free from

traditional silos and embracing a collective approach to learning and development.

When schools first closed due to the pandemic, teachers faced a steep learning curve. Nandashree shares that their initial response was providing training sessions on computer usage for teachers. However, as the crisis deepened, trial and error and peer teaching became the primary methods of skill development. Teachers quickly realized that conveying the curriculum was insufficient; they needed to diversify their strategies to engage students in a virtual environment. This led to the incorporation of games, interactive activities, and even virtual field trips, requiring an enormous amount of preparatory learning and creativity. Initially, teachers faced intellectual discomfort while adapting to technology. Teachers struggled to replicate the hands-on experience necessary for preschoolers' learning. Nevertheless, motivation and commitment to their students drove them to overcome these challenges.

Historically, professional development for teachers in India was primarily the responsibility of schools. In the case of government schools it was the responsibility

of government departments to plan, organize, and assess teacher learning. However, the pandemic led to a paradigm shift in teacher and government approaches to professional development. A significant majority of teachers took matters into their own hands, becoming proactive learners adapting swiftly to online teaching methodologies. They embraced various opportunities for growth, attending workshops, webinars, and even funding their own participation in professional development programs. Furthermore, they engaged in knowledge creation, sharing and collaboration with their peers, recognizing the immense value of learning from one another. The pandemic highlighted that while formal training programs and courses are essential, it is the collaborative and supportive learning environment among teachers that truly fosters growth and innovation.

The resilience and adaptability demonstrated by teachers throughout the pandemic underscored the urgent need for shifting our understanding of continuous professional development opportunities to bottom-up, organic, and teacher-driven models. Post pandemic, a new and all-encompassing



Photos courtesy: Nandashree Natarajan

understanding emerged. This understanding covered five areas of teacher learning, each of which is entwined with the others: technological, content, pedagogical, social, and emotional. Some of the new subskills emerging from these areas were technological classroom management, technological pedagogical integration, effective presentation techniques, and ensuring active student participation. Collaboration between administrators, parents, teachers, and children emerged as a critical aspect of effective learning for teachers. As our interviewees corroborated, teachers attended workshops, webinars, and courses, but what stood out was

the sharing of knowledge and collaboration between teachers. Strong networking with students, parents, and each other led to learning crossing the boundaries of the classroom and opening up new spaces.

The exchange of ideas, experiences, and innovative teaching strategies proved instrumental in navigating the challenges of remote education.

However, access to professional development opportunities has never been equitable for all teachers. Those in rural areas often face limited access to the internet and other resources in addition to incomprehension of English in which most instructions are given. This hampers their ability to stay updated with the latest developments in education. To bridge this gap, mainly in the area of English language and technology, a collaborative approach between urban and rural teachers can be instrumental. By leveraging technology and establishing mentorship programs, experienced teachers from urban areas can support and guide their counterparts in rural regions, enabling a more inclusive and equitable professional development landscape for all teachers. During COVID, Sikkim set an example of bridging the gap for other states by innovatively using radio, local television channels and other media\* to train teachers as well as continue with uninterrupted lessons for the students.

In the past, the well-being of teachers was often overlooked both by schools and the teachers

themselves. However, the shift to online teaching during the pandemic brought various stresses for teachers while working from home. Despite these challenges, teachers managed to maintain their professionalism and didn't let personal struggles affect their classroom teaching and management. Recognizing the significance of teachers' well-being, many school managements began organizing meetings and interactions focused on mental well-being, arranging talks by counsellors and offering courses on positivity. These initiatives have since become integral parts of today's school setup, highlighting the growing importance of prioritizing teachers' mental health.

The conversation below provides valuable insights from two highly experienced administrators. They share their experiences, showing how teachers navigated through unprecedented circumstances and the positive changes that emerged from prioritizing teacher well-being.

**Nandashree:** Ours is a private school. There were no government programs for us especially at the pre-school level. Our school conglomerate, Sri Kumaran's, regularly organizes workshops by prominent educators.

**Nivedita:** How did these 'stand-alone' workshops help during the pandemic?

**Nandashree:** In the beginning, they did not help much. It was a period of trauma; we were all working out of our comfort zones. A stand-alone workshop needs sustained anchoring for application in day-to-day

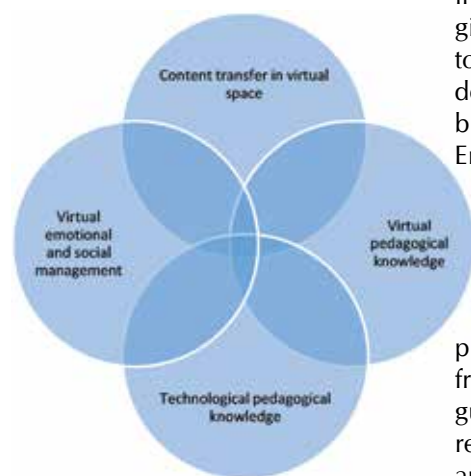


Fig. 1: Changes in the knowledge of teachers

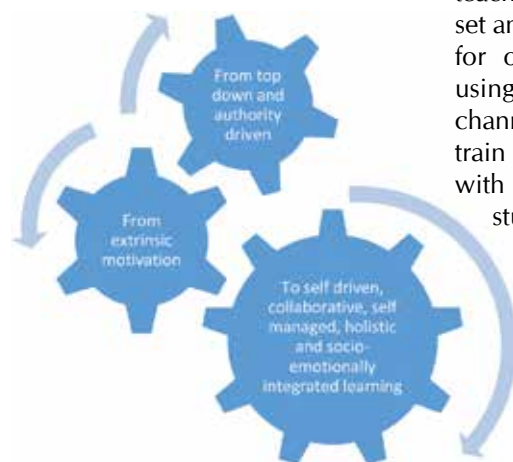
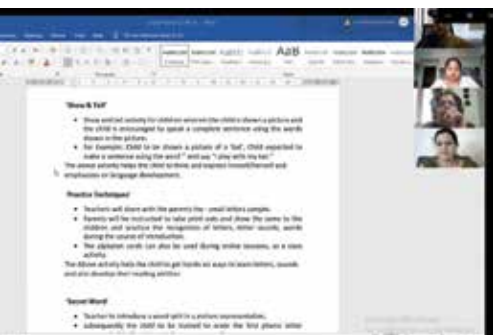


Fig. 2: Changes in the learning paradigm

\*<https://sikkim.gov.in/media/press-release/press-info?name=COVID-19+and+how+it+is+transforming+the+Education+Sector+in+Sikkim>



pedagogy. Later, we created an open resource folder of learnings from various sources. I anchored it during its inception. Later, teachers contributed to, dipped into it and shared learning from the folder regularly. For example, the folder contained lesson plans on how to use apps like kahoot, an online game-based learning space and Menti-meter, a quiz and poll platform. This spread enthusiasm. We were pulled into the world of innovative pedagogies.

**Nivedita:** How did government programs help?

**Roshan:** After a month of COVID lockdown, there were messages from the government to start online teaching. We were worried, but the transition happened smoothly. Our IT teacher took over. He created learning groups on Whatsapp. We learnt fast after the initial hiccups. We met in school during the breaks in lockdown and virtually too. There was a lot of sharing of different apps, videos, lesson plan ideas, questions, assignments, and motivation of children. The year was not lost at all. We even had oral exams virtually. Also, NISHTHA was a boon. It was interactive and teachers worked hard to complete all the modules both for certification and learning.

**Nivedita:** While teaching online, the classroom entered the homes of students. What were the challenges, and what did you learn from them?

**Nandashree:** One major challenge was that some teachers were

coping with the loss of loved ones. But, they never missed a class, which was both heart-warming and heart-wrenching. We also organized staff meetings for well-being, where teachers exchanged greetings and shared their concerns. This fostered strong emotional bonds among the staff. Of course, we also held meetings for learning purposes.

**Nivedita:** Can you recall any extraordinary challenges you faced?

**Roshan:** In online classes, parents would appear on the screen, particularly those who were first-generation learners. Many households lacked separate rooms for children to learn, so everything happened in the same space where the teachers were teaching. The entire family would be listening and watching the class together. This required teachers to be extremely cautious about their words and tone. Moreover, cell phones, previously exclusive to parents, now had to be shared with children for educational purposes. Messages from teachers had to be responded to by either parents or children, and schedules had to be followed. All of this presented a significant learning curve for both teachers and parents, teaching us essential lessons in virtual management. Every aspect was challenging, but one shocking incident remains vivid in my memory. An inappropriate video was circulated in a class WhatsApp group, causing uproar among the parents. We had to involve the cyber cell to investigate the matter. Eventually, it was discovered that a particular parent's unused phone number had been reassigned to someone else, who maliciously posted in the group.

**Nivedita:** Indeed, such incidents are shocking, but sadly not

uncommon. Many schools implemented preventive measures to avoid such situations. I understand it must have been distressing for you.

**Roshan:** Distressing is an understatement. We were bombarded with questions from parents, had to answer the police, and feared a repeat incident. However, we united as teachers and administrators, devising collaborative strategies.

The above conversation underscores the resilience of educators and their ability to adapt to virtual learning, but also highlights the importance of socio-emotional support in teacher development, virtual management skills, and preventive measures to address unforeseen challenges that arise in an online learning environment.

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic served as a catalyst for change in the field of education, urging teachers to rapidly adapt and embrace new pedagogies and technologies. The resilience and creativity displayed by teachers across India during this challenging time were remarkable. The experience highlighted the power of collaboration with teachers stepping out of their comfort zones and actively engaging in learning from their peers. While access to professional development opportunities remains unequal, efforts should be made to bridge the gap, ensuring that all teachers have the resources and support they need to continually enhance their skills. By embracing the role of learners themselves, teachers are better equipped to guide and empower their students, creating a brighter future for education in India.

# My utterly teacherly family!

Anuradha C

The author is an IT industry drop-out after several years of slogging and money-making. She is now working freelance as a corporate technical trainer and content writer. She is hoping to channelize her passion for writing into a satisfying experience for herself and a joyous experience for her readers. She can be reached at [anuradhac@gmail.com](mailto:anuradhac@gmail.com).

Keeping up with the glorious and celebrated occasion of Teacher's Day, I decided to turn in my story for the month as an ode to the teachers of my acquaintance. But when I turned my head to look around, I realized that I have enough teachers right within my family to fill a stadium! Now that's an exaggeration and you know it, but you get the drift, right?

Instead of looking far and wide, I've decided to chronicle all the teachers among the daddies, aunties, and uncles around me. To say teaching is our family vocation, is not too far from the truth. Like you have the merchant clans, the political dynasties, the default vocation in my family is teaching. There are the odd ones who turned out to be 'mere' engineers or bankers, but the overwhelming majority are teachers.

Most of them are serving or retired professors from reputed institutions in India and overseas. It goes without saying that they are all PhD degree holders or beyond. But if you happen to catch up with them, all cozily huddled at a family wedding, you wouldn't be able to guess that you are amidst a gang of doctorates! They just come across as simple, fun-loving folks with empathy for people and a crazy passion for books. Let me begin with a round of cheers to my utterly teacherly family!

You might wonder, why you should be reading about a bunch of teachers you don't know. Every teacher that I talk about in my story exhibits some exemplary trait that is worth admiring and emulating. These are ordinary people with an extra something that makes them special teachers. Read on, you'll know what I mean.

**The patriarch who started it all:** For a rural household living off farming income in pre-independence India, he broke the stereotype and became one of the first graduates of his village, in a remote part of Tamil Nadu. He then went on to become a celebrated English language professor, was instrumental in setting up new educational institutions in several locations across India. He even had a widely read newspaper column titled "Know Your English"! He left behind a legacy of family generations who caught on to the academic bug. He left behind an even greater legacy – as an ardent spiritual seeker and follower of Ramana Maharshi's teachings.

**My father-in-law, a hero for his students:** In the early years of my marriage, I knew him as a straight-faced, reputed English professor with a fantastic vocabulary. But every time I encountered one of his former students,



I discovered a new facet to his character. He came across as a gregarious, highly sought after teacher who would regale his students with witty tales on language evolution and literature. He was also their hero who had stepped beyond his academic duties and helped many a student gain college admission or get a job offer just when they needed it most. He is 85 years old now, and finds it challenging to remember every happening from today or yesterday. However, you strike a conversation on Bernard Shaw and he is all fired up and ready with a twinkle in his eye! What I admire most about him is this – his literary knowledge, and the fact that his command over his mother tongue Tamil is even better than his English.

**The teacher who has all the traits of a naughty student:** He loved to bunk classes and take up sports.

He prefers to read PG Wodehouse to serious heavy literature. He has a quirky sense of humor and a prankster image. He did his PhD with great reluctance! Sounds more like a naughty student? No, he is a popular English professor from a reputed foreign language institute. Newly retired and back to following his first love – sports!

**Even the women married into the family are rock star teachers:** One of them is an exemplary professor of media and communication. She is so passionate about teaching that she runs this magazine *Teacher Plus* with great gusto and inspiration. Since 1989!

**Three small-town sisters who became pioneer teachers in an all-girls college:** Young and bright sisters from a conservative household. Two of them pursued English and one physics. They served their entire teaching

tenure in their alma mater. Even went on to take up the reigns of management at their college. But the student in them is still alive and kicking – one of them is pursuing her Masters in Sanskrit presently while another is a proponent of yoga and mudras!

**The IISc prof who excelled in the industry too:** It's rare for excellent academicians to fit into the industry. Result oriented application of research and rapidly changing market dynamics are the reason. But this one transitioned beautifully from being a high profile IISc professor to a top-notch scientist at a leading pharma company.

**The one who taught the Koreans their English:** She invariably holds centerstage in every party with her witty repartee. An English professor who can give the native English speakers a run for their

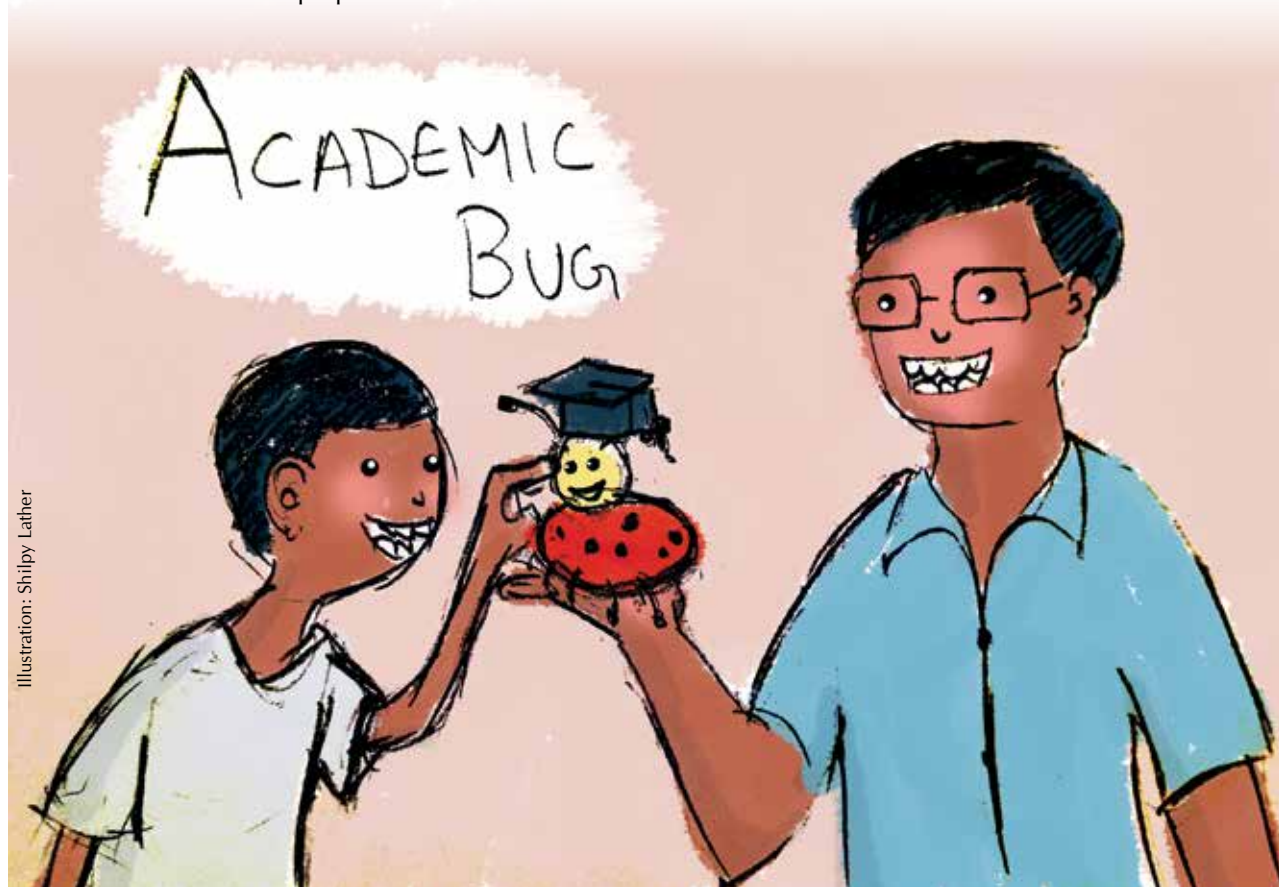


Illustration: Shilpy Lather

money with her flawless pronunciation! A challenging assignment in her long freelance teaching career was to train the Korean expats of an automobile giant setting up shop in India, in English! Since then, language tutoring to South Asian professionals has caught up in a big way in India.

**Housewife to PhD scholar to celebrated micro-biology professor:** Happy housewife, her husband's sudden demise forced her to get back to work. She completed her PhD while caring for her two infants. She went on to become a researcher and professor of micro-biology. She is the darling of her students – has been a guide and mentor to scores of women pursuing this niche subject. A teacher who has sleepless anxious nights everytime her students are preparing for their thesis viva!

**A techie engineer who found his calling as a teacher:** After a career spanning several decades in one of India's top PSUs, he still felt a void in his professional life. Post retirement, he landed up teaching under-privileged graduate engineers merely by accident. In a ramshackle building in a corner of Bengaluru, with modest teaching aids, he helped hundreds of jobless engineers get jobs in the tech industry. Students from the remotest parts of Chhattisgarh, Assam, Jharkhand, Odisha have landed their first job as a result. My father, I say with pride!

As the youngest member of the family and the least accomplished amongst all these haloed teachers, I have a unique distinction – of being the gadget guru of the family! How to connect over Zoom / GMeet, how to enroll into online classes of their choice, how to make YouTube videos of their favourite subject – such are our sessions.

I often ask my folks how they've kept their mojo going for decades. How they've overcome the typical problems associated with teaching – becoming obsolete with time, losing inspiration in a repetitive job.

Some quips from them that helped me unearth the secret ingredients to their success:

"Only a good student can become a good teacher. Why do you think we are sitting here learning all this tech stuff from you!"

"We've got to embrace the tech revolution. The richness of our subject shouldn't get lost due to obsolete teaching aids."

"Once out of college, my students become my buddies. They are a constant source of up-to-date technology trends and facilitate industry-academia partnership."

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# Eight ways to stay foolish, stay hungry

**Aditi Mathur and Ratnesh Mathur**

The authors run Aarohi, an Open Learning Community for learners of all ages, open to all kinds of interests, abilities, styles, and content areas. Learning by doing what one wants, how one wants, and self-reflection. It is a community to co-live, learn and support each other. Aarohi's campus is in a village near Hosur in Tamil Nadu (55 km from Bengaluru). To know more about Aarohi, visit <https://aarahilife.org>.

**S**teve Jobs (co-founder Apple Computers) popularized this maxim in one of his famous speeches: “Stay hungry, stay foolish.”

More than to anybody else, we think, this maxim applies to us – teachers, facilitators, and parents; those of us who work with children.

Here are eight ways to stay foolish and hungry!

1. A fool knows that the best people from whom to learn about children and how they learn are children themselves. But how can we learn if we think we already know?

**So we play the fool.** We make the children believe that we do not know anything about them (which is actually true because children are constantly changing/evolving). To play the fool, we ask them simple questions about them. Questions such as, “What interests you?” “How would you like to do this?”, “What are you feeling right now?” and so on.

The more we ask, the more we listen, and the more we listen, the more we learn. The more we learn about them, the more we become effective in facilitating their learning.

You see, only a fool will ask children to facilitate them so that they can, in turn, facilitate the children.

2. Fools also know that the best way to learn something is to teach it. Which is why they invite children to do the teaching. They do that either by showing that they know only little (even if they know a lot), or showing what they know is incorrect, or purposefully making mistakes (so that children correct them) or simply value the children’s status as higher than theirs by genuinely seeking their view of a certain piece of knowledge and valuing it.

This definitely helps fools to widen their way of looking at a topic, especially getting the children’s perspective.

Try this: Tell your children that what you are going to teach/say will have some errors and whoever finds the error will be called the goldminer (or whatever) of the day.

3. Fools look beyond the obvious, act outside conventions, and hope beyond the expected. If we do this as teachers, we ignite the energies of children to enlarge and widen their

knowledge, thinking skills, and learning. Isn’t that education?

Any school or family can create a culture of allowing themselves to live beyond the boxes. It’s fun and super enterprising.

Let’s say we spend 10 minutes in a day trying to prove that  $2 + 2 = 5$ , or that the Earth is flat, or that reading backwards gives more meaning, or whatever you and your children can come up with.

4. When someone is hungry they push. But when a fool is hungry he/she pushes without expectations and this combination of being foolish and hungry is amazing with children. You see children don’t mind being pushed. They love being pushed (given challenges). What they DO NOT like is the load of expectations that teachers and parents seem to have just because we are older!

Someone once asked us how to give children consequences of their behaviour. We said we haven’t thought of consequences since 2002 when we started working with children. We push them to understand or figure the world out from their perspective and not to agree with our conclusions. We push them to create their own values and benchmarks. You see, we are persistent in both pushing them and in believing that children, like us, want to do and learn and achieve and live to their best.

5. Most of us are not just hungry, we are hungry for variety. Obviously we do not want the



Photos courtesy: Aarohi Community



same food every day. When teachers or parents ask us how we can be effective – we say search for a new way, or together as a class or family keep looking for new ways to do and learn something. To give an example, when Aarohi shifted to its new campus in 2013 we decided that every Thursday we will play a new game for our evening sports – something that we have never played before.

Ten years later, over the last 400 or so Thursdays, whichever adult or child is responsible for the evening sports designs or brings up a totally new game.

This hunger for variety satiates not just the intellect, but our belief in our own capabilities and ingenuity.



6. A foolish fish says, *I'll swim upstream, for even a dead one can float with the current.* Foolishly hungry fishes may not find anything new upstream, but it sure does something to them. People see going against convention as foolishness, but by doing so what we develop is strength and acumen.

For example, we tell adults and children alike not to correct other's spellings. Let them write the way they are writing. When they see another spelling in books or on the internet, they will automatically observe and exclaim, "*Oh so that's how the world writes it!*"

7. Fools are often rebuked as empty-headed. So be it. When we are empty (of notions, beliefs and knowing), we observe. Often, we observe carefully and find gems hidden from obvious view in between the flowing water and the rocks (actions and knowledge). We find understanding. We begin to understand children. We eschew labels, since we're empty-headed. Rather, we chew on what we observe and this typically reveals

ideas, which were hitherto unavailable to us.

One child was universally and diagnostically categorized as hyperactive. We refused to accept this label. We kept ourselves empty-headed. We just observed him. We saw how he connected many things in his head as he moved from one object or action to another. We invited him to use these connections to make contraptions, stories, processes, etc. And he started to create!

8. "*What else* is there to eat?" asked the hungry.

So "*What else?*" is what we too ask. *What else* is there to consider, to explore, to sample? *What else* is there to enjoy, to achieve, to celebrate? What else will fools do in such a situation? What else will make me even more hungry? What else can I be?

– What Else? –

TP



# Continuing to stay relevant

**Vasudha Kapoor**

The author is the co-founder of Mera Gaon Meri Duniya, an organization that works in the rural areas of Madhya Pradesh to improve systemic foundations of the government school system through empowering youth leadership. She is also associated with an organization called Plustrust, which provides micro-incubation support for budding women entrepreneurs in rural and tribal areas. She is a Wipro seeding fellow and a former Edumentum and Changelooms fellow. She is a gold medallist in the Post-Graduate program in Human Development and Childhood Studies from the University of Delhi. She can be reached at [vasudha@meragaonmeridunia.org](mailto:vasudha@meragaonmeridunia.org).

What does a teacher need to be up-to-date about? Subject knowledge for one. Then come the methods and pedagogy of the subject. There are also the children, their contexts and inner states. Using the latest technology, knowing what's happening in the world, the purpose of education, policy and its implementation, child rights, health, assessments, work-life balance, their own self. This seems like a lot to be updated about!

Here I share a few simple things that teachers can do to reduce their stress levels and stay up-to-date.

1. Take some time out for the self everyday. Spending time in solitude and doing what gives you joy leaves space to make sense of existing thoughts and creates a fertile space for new ideas to emerge.
2. Become an innovator. Make your everyday work easy and convenient. During COVID, teachers made handy mobile stands to record videos without assistance.



*self made mobile stand.*

Photos courtesy: Vasudha Kapoor

3. Be a part of caring and collaborative teacher communities. A space like this can effortlessly help teachers be up-to-date, share their 'functional' wisdom in peculiar classroom situations, reach out for help for specific needs and provide exclusive empathy to each other. In one of the teacher communities I facilitate regularly, I have seen teachers constantly share strategies that have worked in their context.





Facilitating community building exercises with teachers in rural schools in Ujjain.



In-school teacher circles reflective circles.

4. Read for fun. As we grow and progress in our career, reading for pure fun decreases. A space where teachers can regularly read what brings them joy can bring on reflection, pause their thoughts and make them more anchored as a person. At MGMD (Mera Gaon Meri Duniya), we have a decentralized library system with 12 thousand plus children's books. These books are regularly read in all the government schools we closely work with. Now the question is, is children's literature only for children? With a couple of months of encouraging teachers to bring literature alive in their classrooms, we have seen that most teachers have started to enjoy good children's literature for themselves. They read and re-read stories like *Macher jhol* by Richa Jha, *Cutli toh pari hai* by Kanak Shashi and many more. I feel they have picked up this habit not because it helps them in their lesson planning, but because it helps them connect with their inner child.

5. Access teacher education material. Subscribe to good magazines that will help teachers reflect and learn at their

own pace. Apart from *Teacher Plus*, *Sandarbh* by Eklavya is a great tool for teachers who find it comfortable to read in Hindi. Teachers can also share their rich classroom experiences in these magazines. *Shiksha Vimarsh* is another magazine that talks about issues in education.

6. Create in-house teacher circles. This may not sound like a very special idea, but honestly in how many schools do teachers have a dedicated time to meet, sit, and discuss student

progress, parent involvement, classroom challenges and the ways they are navigating them? There is so much wisdom in one room but we are hardly harnessing it! The space can be rightfully used to create a school goal and further address interpersonal issues or help each other.

7. Observe another teacher's classroom. Such an exercise can help alternate ideas emerge, understand one's strengths and weaknesses and get food for reflection. When a teacher,



Teachers giving exposure to parents of new story based methods that improve children's literacy skills. As parents experience, they feel more aligned to the new methods.





*Teachers outreached and involved local youth to volunteer to organize learning festivals in 10 government schools in villages of Ujjain.*

who unknowingly used fear to manage the children in her class (not corporal punishment but subtler behaviour modifications like raising her voice, an angry stare, etc.), observed another teacher use positive affirmation and tools like behaviour management cycle, she realized how she could behave differently.

8. Partner with the parents. In many schools, teachers lament the lack of parental support and involvement to achieve the desired progress with their

students. There is no better teacher for the child than the parent. Join hands with the parents, help them help you.

9. Volunteer! It can be a great idea to volunteer in other spaces. Working in an area different from your usual work can help expand perspectives and create acceptance for differing worldviews. Teachers affiliated with MGMTD regularly volunteer in community activities like local health camps. This helps them understand their community

better, expand experiences and most importantly, take a break from their regular role and realize their wholeness. In the same line of thought, get external volunteers into your classroom. After a preliminary training and need sharing, a volunteer can help with different tasks in the classroom. With the help of local volunteers, MGMTD teachers could organize learning festivals in 10 villages, set up art, theatre, dance and sports studios in many government schools.



*Teachers volunteering in health camps in their village.*

To sum this up, I think teaching is about DREAMING big and THINKING small. Undoubtedly, teaching is extraordinary work done by ordinary humans. More than being put up on a pedestal, this Teacher's Day, let's genuinely empathize with the teachers and acknowledge the work they do, nurture them and give them the dignity and support they deserve.

*Play leads to brain plasticity, adaptability and creativity. Nothing fires up the brain cells like play.*

– Stuart Brown MD

# Analog games – an off screen experience!

**Nabanita Deshmukh**

The author is a teacher, a teacher educator and a writer of children's stories and poems. She can be reached at [deshmukh.nitu@gmail.com](mailto:deshmukh.nitu@gmail.com).

Numerous articles have been written on the detrimental impact of excess screen time on students' health, emotions, and well-being, yet very little has been discussed on teachers' addiction to digital devices. Teachers need off-screen time as much as students do for developing skills not necessarily connected to their teaching profession and these can often be done through games.

Oh, yes! Analog or non-digital games are not mere entertainment but go a long way in fostering bonds between teachers and instilling values of sportsmanship, cooperation, camaraderie, and discipline. Furthermore, they promote hands-on activities, sensory learning and 'real' interactions between players that are absent while playing digital games.

Taking these benefits into consideration, a list of non-digital games that make use of minimum or no equipment is provided to help teachers explore new domains of creativity and amusement. These simple games, if played enthusiastically with the help of game-leaders (dynamic colleagues who can organize and conduct the games) could make teachers more focused, communicative, and lively.

## **Musical games**

Listening to music is a popular pastime for most people and teachers are no exception. Music helps them relax and remain cheerful despite problems they face while teaching. Musical games that combine rhythm, melody, refrain (repetition), guess work, and quick thinking enhances concentration and memory.

**Game name:** What's in that tune?

**Materials:** Music system or mobile phone and Bluetooth speaker

**Objective:** To develop concentration, retention power, quick thinking, and listening skills

**Procedure:**

- Choose a collection of instrumental tunes of popular songs.
- Divide the players into groups and play an instrumental musical piece on the speaker.
- The team that guesses the name of the song, the singer, musical instruments used, or the film (if it is a movie song) gets points and the game continues until the list of musical tunes is exhausted and a winner is proclaimed.

**Variation:** Instead of playing in groups, the game can also be played individually.

**Drawing games**

Drawing is often a neglected activity and teachers hesitate to use it in class especially with older students. Interestingly though, drawing is not only engrossing but when used in games, it brings out the creative characteristics of players and increases motivation and interest.

**Game name:** Draw the word

**Materials:** Word cards

**Objective:** To improve vocabulary with the help of drawings

**Procedure:**

- Prepare small word cards with

words of objects written on them and put them in a bag.

- Ask a player to pick up a card, read it silently and then draw it on the board.
- The player who guesses the word first, gets a point.
- The game continues until all the cards are exhausted and the player with the maximum number of points is the winner.

**Game name:** Drawing dictation

**Materials:** Chart paper, sketch pens, black/white board, chalk/white board markers

**Objective:** To develop precise instructional skills

**Procedure:**

- Draw an object on a large chart paper such as a house, for example. Roll the chart paper and stand facing the players (audience) with your back to the board.
- Call a player (volunteer) to the board. Unroll the chart paper and show the drawing only to the audience. The volunteer does not get to see the drawing.
- The players in the audience verbally instruct the volunteer, one after another to accurately reproduce the chart paper drawing on the board. Each player can only use one sentence at a time to instruct.
- The volunteer becomes the winner only if he/she manages to reproduce the drawing accurately after listening to a pre-decided

number of instructions by the game-leader.

**Sensory games**

Sensory perceptions play a vital role not only in learning a language but also in improving concentration, motivation, and comprehension. Sensory games that combine predictive skills through the sense of smell and tactile stimulation become an absorbing pastime.

**Game name:** Feel it!

**Materials:** Small objects and a bag

**Objective:** To enhance predictive skills through the sense of touch

**Procedure:**

- Put small objects inside a non-transparent bag like buttons, erasers, matchbox, safety pin, pens, etc.
- Make the players sit in a circle pass the bag around. Each player has to feel the objects and name any one of them aloud.
- The bag gets emptied on a table when everyone finishes their turn.
- The players who identified the objects correctly get points.
- To lengthen the game, each player can say a few words about her/his object by drawing on personal experiences.

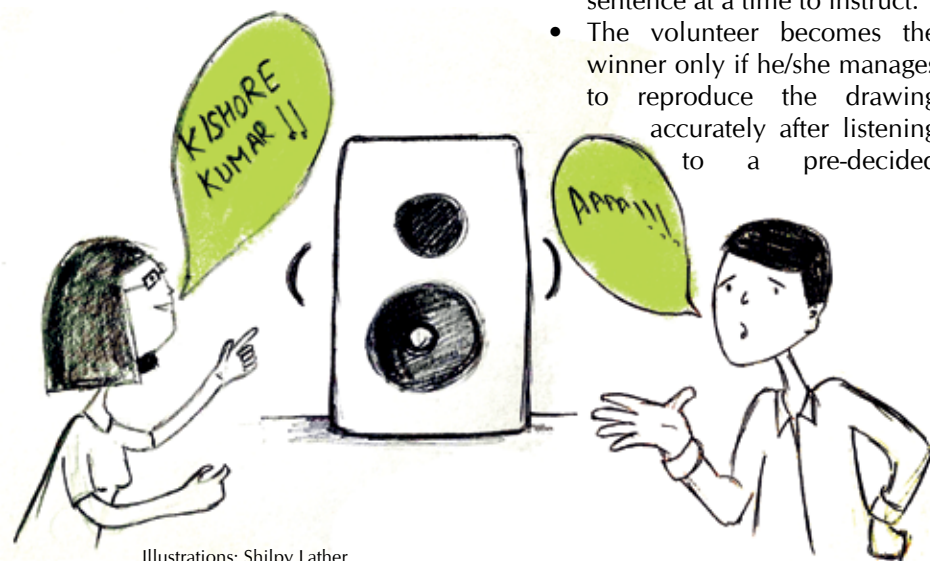
**Game name:** Smell it!

**Materials:** Fragrance-emitting flowers

**Objective:** To enhance predictive skills and memory through the sense of smell

**Procedure:**

- Pluck a large number of fragrance-emitting flowers from the immediate environment and arrange them on a tray.
- The players are given five minutes to smell the flowers and know their names.
- A blindfold is then placed around a player's eyes.



Illustrations: Shilpy Lather



- The game leader picks up a flower and makes the blindfolded player smell it.
- If the blindfolded player says the correct name of the flower he/she gets a point.
- The game continues until every player gets a chance to smell and guess the names of the flowers.

**Variation:** Instead of having individual players, the game can be played in groups.

### Interactive listening games

The art of listening is not confined to students alone but to teachers as well. In fact, one of the ways of modelling good learning habits is by listening attentively to what the students have to say. In this regard, a listening game combined with good diction is going to be an interesting pastime for teachers.

**Game name:** The tail end

**Materials:** None

**Objective:** To develop good listening skills, memory, articulation, and quick thinking

**Procedure:**

- A player begins by saying a word aloud.
- The person sitting next to him says another word starting with the ending letter of the word his neighbour has said.
- The game thus continues with every player saying a word beginning with the last letter of the word the person sitting beside them has said.
- Players who repeat a word already said by someone else and those who cannot come up with a word during a limited time frame are considered 'out'.
- The player who survives all the rounds is declared the winner.

### Writing games

Writing is never easy to practise, especially in this digital age

where a lot of our time goes in browsing the internet or sending short, telegraphic messages on social media. In this regard, an interesting game on story writing is worth trying out!

**Game name:** Story folds

**Materials:** Pens and paper sheets

**Objective:** To develop story writing skills and motivation

**Procedure:**

- Take a sheet of paper, preferably a ruled page.
- Make players sit in a circle and on desks. Each person needs to have a pen.
- The first player (Player1) starts a story by writing one sentence at the top of the paper sheet and then passes it to the player sitting next to her/him (Player 2).
- Player 2 continues writing the story by adding one more sentence below the first one.

She/he then folds the topmost part of the paper sheet so as to hide the sentence written by Player 1.

- The paper sheet then goes to Player 3 who adds one more sentence and then hides Player 2's sentence with a fold.
- The paper sheet is thus passed around until all the players get a chance to write.
- The game-leader then opens the folds and reads out the story.

**Variation:** Instead of writing stories, players could begin drawing and each player adds something to the drawing by folding the top parts of the paper as the game progresses.

### Quick thinking games

Quick thinking is an important ability that helps teachers take decisions and solve problems quickly in the classroom and



beyond. Games that contain elements to develop this ability along with opportunities to improve verbal skills become all the more interesting.

**Game name:** Word talk

**Materials:** Paper slips with words written on them, small bag

**Objective:** To help teachers talk freely by using guided-speaking techniques

**Procedure:**

- Write words on small paper slips; fold them up and put them into a bag.
- Ask a player (Player 1) to pick up three paper slips from the bag.
- Player 1 reads the words silently and then starts to talk for approximately 30 seconds by using all the words written on his slips.
- The game continues with all the other players/speakers getting a chance to pick up word slips and talk.
- The player who talks confidently and convincingly is voted as the winner.

### Communicative games

Communication is the building block of good social skills. A teacher who can express herself/himself well and engage in meaningful conversations is not only an asset in the classroom but in her social circle as well. The art of asking questions and responding to them is an important aspect of communication and games that contain interrogative elements are worth playing.

**Game name:** Five questions

**Materials:** None

**Objective:** To develop questioning skills and the ability to answer questions

**Procedure:**

- Ask a player (Player 1) to think of an object.

- The other players have to ask her/him questions that pertain to size, colour, usage, shape, location, etc. Player 1 answers the questions articulately.
- Five questions can be asked by different players to guess the correct answer.
- The player who gets the right answer or word thought of by Player 1 is the winner.
- The game continues with the other players who take on the role of thinkers one after another.

### Mixed ability games

Games that develop mixed abilities are original and interesting as they cater to a diverse group of players. The modes used in such games are based on movement (kinaesthetic), art (drawing, craft), acting (dramatics), and writing. Creativity and thinking 'out-of-the-box' play an important role in these types of games.

**Game name:** Pickled charade

**Resources:** Slips of paper

**Objective:** To promote imagination, comprehension, out-of-the-box thinking, and drawing skills.

**Procedure:**

- Write words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc.) on slips of paper, fold them and place them in a box.
- Each player picks up a slip from the box and acts/writes/draws to help the other players guess the 'word'. For example, in the word 'sundial' the word 'dial' can be partially drawn or shown through craft, while 'sun' can be mimed or the first letter 's' could be written on the board as a clue.
- The player who guesses the right answer gets a point.

**Game name:** Colour rings

**Materials:** Large tub of water,

rubber bands of different colours, pencils

**Objective:** To develop comprehension and eye-hand coordination

**Procedure:**

- Make a compilation of riddles or write cryptic clues on colours.
- Take a tub of water and throw in a set number of different coloured rubber bands.
- Make a player stand in front of the tub with a pencil in hand and read out a riddle or a cryptic clue on a particular colour. A good example of a riddle would be:

*Orange, violet, yellow,  
Blue, green and indigo,  
What's the missing colour  
That is in a rainbow?*

(Answer: red)

- The player has to guess the answer and pick up as many red rubber bands with a pencil. The game leader could fix a time limit for the game.
- The player who picks the maximum number of rubber bands of the correct colour from riddles or cryptic clues read out by the game-leader is the winner.

The games described in this article can be played with either small or large groups of players with minimum resources. There are however, like in all other group activities, a few challenges like finding the time, getting a dynamic game leader, forming groups, locating a venue, etc. However, if teachers make non-digital games a part of their learning curve, then their dependence on digital devices would surely wane and creative, fun, and 'real' interactions would assume an important role in their day-to-day life and work.

# From reflection to growth – a journey through writing

**Geetha Durairajan**

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More than a decade ago, sometime in the latter half of 2011, I wrote an article titled “Coloured Judgments” for an ELT (English Language Teaching) e-newsletter. In it I had spoken about racial biases within me; how during an official visit to Sri Lanka, I had seen a lady in unkempt clothes, untidy hair, and dark skin, sitting in an interpreter’s booth and assumed that she was a clerk, when in actual fact she was one of the leading national level interpreters who could listen to experts talking in English on testing and evaluation and simultaneously translate into Tamizh. When the editor (calling her PSP from now on) of the newsletter read my article, she rang me up to ask, “Are you sure you want this published?” From the tone of her voice I understood that such a ‘harsh’ critical self-reflection about hidden racial biases within all of us, did not go down well with her. It must have shaken her up, held up a mirror, making her see her own biases, which she probably could not face or confess let alone write about openly. Her query, however, did not upset me. I had the courage of conviction about what I wanted to write and therefore emphatically asserted, “Yes, I am very sure” and even went on to ask, “Why not?” I had deliberately chosen to write about my biases and how and why we need to get over them. For me, such sharing was not just about getting over

my biases, but helping others see the hidden biases in themselves so that we can all get over them. PSP had no choice but to publish it, because she had invited me to write it. I did not gloat, but was glad it was read by other teachers. A few months later, I was approached by the editor of this magazine, *Teacher Plus*, and asked if I would write for them. Not having written for schoolteachers till then, I was not sure if I could effectively reach out to schoolteachers. I therefore sent her the piece I had written for the newsletter and asked if something like this would be okay. The editor was delighted. Not only did she ask me if this piece itself could be republished, but also convinced me to start a bi-monthly column, *Touchstone*, which some of you may be familiar with. “Coloured Judgments” became the first in the *Touchstone* series, published in February 2012. But another friend of mine took



12 years to learn to gain the same confidence that came to me naturally. My friend's growth was hard and laborious because she was caught up with all the negativity of PSP and could not get rid of her as she was a colleague and a 'boss' at work. Post 12 years, my friend finally grew for the better\*.

I am reflecting on this more than a decade old experience because I could have very easily been put down by PSP's questioning and doubting. I would have then remained someone without confidence, stuck in my old prejudiced colonial biased ways, not able to grow. That did not happen because I had confidence in myself. All of us as teachers, at some time or other, will encounter such negative people, particularly if we want to step outside the box and do something different. We have to make sure that we do not allow such experiences and such negativity to adversely affect us. We need to maintain our self-esteem and ensure that our identity is not defined by other people's perceptions of ourselves. One of the ways in which we grow as teachers is to believe in ourselves and not be ruled by other people's opinions or evaluation of either our work or our ideas. This is crucial, for such 'being put down' by colleagues/peers either because of jealousy, or their own masked inadequacy, or negative nature happens more often than we realize. As teachers, we feel it happens only to us and never talk about it. We need to rise above it to grow.

This type of courage of conviction alone, however, is not enough to ensure that we grow as teachers,

\*Today, my friend's growth is captured in the poem at the end of this article and she used the setbacks as her muses.

although it is a very important component. In another article in this issue, Dr. Shree Deepa has written about how she draws from personal life experiences to make her classes a joyful art. In nearly each of my articles written for *Teacher Plus*, and particularly the Touchstone articles, I chose to draw on either my personal experiences or my observations of everyday life to trigger thought processes in you my readers and also to help me grow not just as a teacher but as a humane educator.

In the September 2012 issue of *Teacher Plus*, I wrote an article called "Running, walking, hopping, and jogging" where I spoke about how I wrote four 'odd man out' words (multiple choice, vocabulary exercise) on a blackboard for teachers in a testing workshop to discuss the value of good distractors, but took the meanings of words like 'hop' and 'jog' for granted and realized that this was not the case. I learnt that day that "when everyday life includes running to catch a bus or train, and where one walks a few kilometers to reach the nearest bus stop, the notion of jogging does not exist!" As soon as I got a research associate to demonstrate

the difference between hopping and jogging, the odd word was immediately identified. The use of two simple words taught me that we need to learn to "hop into a learner's mind and jog in his shoes to understand what learner-centredness truly means".

Three years later, in the January 2015 issue, I wrote an article called "A Slide, a saviour, a solution"; in this article, I reflected on my observations in a children's park near my house. This time, I gained better insights not just into learner-centredness but human-centredness as well. In this article I wrote about how I had seen a young girl sitting on the top of a slide in the park, petrified, not knowing how to slide down, and how a 12 year old boy had instinctively known what to do and given that girl her first joyful slide ride. That boy had human-centredness in him, which we often miss out on as teachers.

Learning to be humane is something we have to strive for all our lives, and there is no age limit to such learning. If we keep our eyes and ears, and most importantly, our hearts open, we can learn and grow by observation



Illustrations: Tasneem Amiruddin

and reflection. When the Sri Lanka incident happened in 2011, I was already 55 years old, and a professor at the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad. But that did not prevent me from learning or growing. I did not sit back on my laurels and think that I have learnt all that there is to learn. If we as teachers wish to grow and be active and find satisfaction in our teaching, we need to remain learners all our lives.

One other way in which we can continue to remain learners is through interaction with peers. This is important because while observation and reflection are valuable, they can cocoon us into self-contained islands where we feel that we do not need to interact with our colleagues and peers. One of the purposes of asking teachers to attend conferences and seminars is to enable peer interaction. But mere attending does not always enable growth. Genuine sharing and discussions with non-judgmental peers is equally important.

A good example of this is the way I have grown post retirement through my interactions with Dr. Shree



Deepa. I had, like many other ELT professionals and experts in the field, assumed that language ability is all about mastering a skill and that proficiency as a language user is the ultimate goal of language teaching. In the August 2022 issue of this magazine, Dr. Deepa wrote an article called, "The what and how of teacher talk". In that article, she spoke about how language has the potential to be used in a constructive, neutral, or destructive manner. Inspired by her thinking, for I had not encountered this argument about language

potentiality before my interactions with her, I wrote an article in that same issue, titled, "Do we use language to hurt or heal?" Such an article, based on my own reflections of experiences would not have been possible without the valuable interactions and discussions of alternative perspectives with her.

As teachers we cannot afford to become complacent and think that we know it all. As the Tamil poet Avvaiyaar succinctly put it, *katradhu kai maNalavu, kallaadhadhuulagaLavuvu* (What we have learnt is akin to the handful of sand that can be held in the hand; what we have not learnt is as big as this world.)

To observe, reflect, discuss, and then take that next step forward, to write about our learnings, is what keeps us alive as teachers and will help us grow; by sharing our ideas with others, we grow and help others grow. Remember when something sets you back, read the following poem to help pick yourself up!

### Aranmula Grandmother, let me be

The muses continue to inspire me and I thank them in peace and I shall grow!

You let me be and you be!

You bury me? and I am a seed!

You burn me? I am phoenix!

You drown me? I am whale!

You fling me? I am a bird!

You mute me? I am an ascetic!

You kick me? I am a landmine!

You foster me? I am a child!

You be gentle? I am a lotus flower!

You question me? I am Socrates!

You forget unpleasantness? I be amnesiac!

You be kind? I am a grandmother!

I am a potent mother of many children of all kinds, shapes, colours, sizes and ages!

You be nice? I be the nicest!

You let me live? I be your sanjeewini!

I am my guru's devotee! I will be till and after I am dead!

Forget not I have my guru protecting me here and hereafter! He is the sun to my solar panel!

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